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F O L L Y .

A *Nobel*,

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY

MRS. NEWTON SEARS,

Author of "Kismet" and "Cleansing Fires."

"Satan finds some mischief still,
For idle hands to do."

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F O L L Y .

CHAPTER I.

“Man must be pleased, but him to please
Is woman's pleasure! Down the gulf
Of his condoled necessities she casts her best;
She flings herself:
How often flings for nought?”

“AUNT, I am going out this afternoon to see Ruth!”

So said Gladys, as, some week later than the events narrated in the last chapter, she rose from the luncheon table. Miss Kiljoy had been, if anything, a degree less endurable, but Gladys had a talisman of which her aunt knew nothing, and she only smiled consciously when the spinster's speeches were sharper and bitterer than

usual, and her heart would quicken its beats while she pondered how strange a thing this new feeling was, how potent a charm love possessed to make her dumb to her aunt's anger and callous to all the wretchedness and discomfort of her life.

But Miss Kiljoy was in ignorance of this new element in her niece's life, and quite at a loss to account for this sudden change of demeanour.

"What do you mean, Gladys?" she asked sharply. "You certainly will not go to see that young person with my consent. I wonder you can expect to do such a thing after the disgraceful way in which she has acted!"

"I am afraid Ruth was to blame, Aunt Tab," said the girl gently. Perhaps the knowledge that she would soon be gone

from under her aunt's roof rendered her more just and helped her to see that Ruth *had* been most insolent to Miss Kiljoy; "but," she added, "you forget how kind she always was to me, and now she is ill. I had a letter from her last night; you can see it if you like," taking it from her pocket and handing it over for her aunt's scrutiny. "I feel that I ought to go and see her."

"Where is she? At Clapham! And you suppose that I shall let you go to a place like that, Gladys? You may make up your mind at once that I shall do nothing of the sort."

Now Gladys was determined to go, but not wishing to flatly disobey her aunt, if she could help it, she said—

"Then go with me yourself. We can

drive there instead of in the Park this afternoon."

Miss Kiljoy snorted and sniffed, and flicked all the bread crumbs off the tablecloth into her lap, and then angrily stalked across the room and dropped the offending atoms with a jerk into the polished steel fender.

"If you go at all I shall take you," she said. And Gladys knew that her point was gained.

Under Miss Kiljoy's keen eyes she carried on her conversation with Ruth, that lady standing by listening to every word, and paying not the slightest attention to the deferential curtsy the *ci devant* lady's maid dropped when she saw who her young lady's companion was.

So far as she could see there was

nothing strange in the visit ; Ruth had been ill, and her niece, who had always been attached to the girl, wished to express her sympathy ! But love laughs at locksmiths. Gladys contrived, whilst ostentatiously admiring a large china teapot that stood on a small bracket by the wall, to slip into it a note containing all she had wished to say to Ruth had they been alone. Ruth's eyes twinkled merrily, and long before her visitors had reached Brunswick Square she had mastered its contents, and hugged her plump little self with satisfaction. "If that isn't just the best news that I've heard for many a long day," quoth she.

Little did Aunt Tab guess what treason had been hatched under her very nose ; she was in rather a better humour as they

dear home, and Gladys felt so grateful and relieved, that she caught herself thinking that if only she were always as pleasant she would never, never have promised to marry Lionel Nairn.

Gladys might love her husband very dearly after the mystic knot had been tied, but she was most indisputably not in love with him before. She was enamoured with liberty, freedom, and all the good things she might hope to attain by taking this step, but nothing beyond—a sorry prospect for happiness had she but known it.

“What is the matter with your niece?” asked Miss Payne, as she and Tabitha sat over a cosy cup of tea together one afternoon.

“Matter? Nothing particularly new—perverseness and obstinacy. What else?”

Nancy shook her head oracularly.

“Tabitha Kiljoy, my advice to you is look after her sharply or you’ll be getting a surprise one of these fine mornings.”

“What do you mean?” demanded the spinster, putting her cup down with a sudden click.

“Ah, dear, it is not to be wondered at that you are blind; you have not had the experience that *I* have (not that it has been any fault of yours; I would not say *that* for the world), but those who have been in love *themselves* are keener and clearer-sighted than others.”

“You—you don’t think?”—Tabby leaned forward, puckering up her yellow cheeks into innumerable wrinkles.

“No, I *don’t!* I am quite sure,” responded Nancy, stoutly.

"But *he's* gone back to India, and there isn't anybody else," said poor Tabitha, helplessly.

Nancy surveyed her friend with a withering look of scorn.

"Ah, my dear, *you* can't be expected to know their tricks and their manners, but I do."

Tabitha felt sat upon, as Nancy intended she should do. It was quite true that she did *not* know anything about the supreme folly called love, and at her time of life it was scarcely likely that she would care to learn. By-and-bye she reasserted herself.

"If I were you, Nancy Payne, I should hold my tongue about your *experiences*, seeing that although you were fool enough to get a lover you were not clever enough

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to keep him. And considering that Gladys is under my own eye from morning till night she isn't likely to make such a goose of herself as you did. She never sees a soul without me by her side, nor does she speak a word which I don't hear."

Nancy was very angry at her friend's allusions to the faithless Fred, but contented herself with compressing her mouth tightly and looking wondrous wise.

Tabitha chaffed uneasily.

"If you *know* anything why don't you speak. I can't bear people to be so glum."

"You don't pay the slightest regard to what I tell you," said Nancy viciously. "It is just so much wasted time, and as you are so very much wiser than I you may find it out for yourself." And having come nearer to a quarrel with her friend

than she ever had done before, she pushed her chair back from the table and rose, hot and blooming like a peony, announcing her intention of returning to Penge immediately.

Miss Kiljoy sent Firkins for a cab, and during the five minutes that elapsed before it rattled up to the door the two ladies sat in total silence. Tabitha poured out another cup of tea and helped herself to another buttered muffin, showing her utter disregard of and indifference to her friend's hostility. And then Miss Payne was whisked away with a very slight "Good afternoon, Tabitha," which met with no response.

Aunt Tabitha was mystified, and annoyed in no little measure at the result of this visit. She could not well afford to quarrel with

Nancy, she being the only friend she possessed, and then Nancy had undoubtedly her good points; she was very sensible in her ideas respecting the dangerous sex. "Where throughout London," thought Tabitha, with a sigh, "would you find a woman holding the views that she did?" It was very vexing and annoying that she should be so touchy! Miss Kiljoy was completely discomfited. Gladys came in for her share of the lady's anger; for the matter of that everyone in the household suffered more or less, for Aunt Tabitha was in the habit of wreaking any displeasure she might feel upon the nearest object. So all Gladys' softened, kindly feelings melted away, and she felt almost as hard and cold as her aunt when she pressed her lips to the withered cheek and re-

ceived the little *peck* that, with Miss Kiljoy, did duty for a good-night kiss on the last night of her sojourn in Brunswick Square.

Next morning all was confusion and dismay. Aunt Tabitha had a headache and did not make her appearance at the breakfast table, ordering a nice little tray of dainties to be brought up to her instead ; and Firkins caring nothing whether Miss Vaughan's coffee was hot or cold, rang the breakfast bell, and then, without waiting to see if its sounds reached the young lady, she speedily shut the door and went off to her own domains. Some hours afterwards she bethought herself that it was strange she had not been summoned to clear away the breakfast things, and called to one of her subordinates, as she went

upstairs with her mistress's hot water, telling her to go and do it.

"Let Firkins do her own work," was Bessy's rejoinder, as she continued an amicable discussion with the baker's boy over the area.

And so it came about that when Miss Kiljoy descended she found the breakfast table still untouched.

"What is the meaning of all this?" she asked waspishly.

Firkins, who was following with a footstool and her mistress's work-bag, responded meekly—

"I told Bessy to clear away as I should be later than usual, but she is such an impudent little bit of goods, marm; I do wish you would send her away. I am sure the sauce she gives me if—"

“Hold your tongue, Firkins, I am not talking about Bessy ; I shall discharge her when I see cause for it. Where is Miss Vaughan ?”

The maid stared.

“Why I declare she has not been down, marm.”

“I can see that as well as you,” said the irate spinster ; “go and see what ails her ! Laziness, nothing more, I’ll be bound,” angrily bouncing down in the arm-chair. But Miss Kiljoy was destined to be even more angry and amazed yet.

In less than two minutes Firkins returned, her face elongated to its utmost extent, and her voice partaking of a curiously modulated and acid tone—

“She’s not there, marm !”

“Firkins, you are a fool !” So apostro-

phised her mistress, with more vehemence than elegance, as, after staring at the firm figure and astonished face for the space of a moment, she slowly rose from her chair and ascended the stairs to her niece's room.

“Gladys, come down at once! I wonder how you dare—” she commenced in a high key, throwing the door wide open. But there was no response. A drawer in the bureau was half-open, and a scrap of lace had fallen to the ground beneath it; two or three dead roses in a glass on the dressing-table, and a small blue shoe—one that Gladys had been wont to wear in an evening—lay tossed over near the fireplace, and that was all that was left to speak to Aunt Tabitha of Gladys' maiden life.

Miss Kiljoy shut the door sharply and commenced a diligent search through the

apartment. In the fender were hundreds of infinitesimal atoms of letter paper too much torn and blackened to give any hope of their ever being deciphered, but the lady gathered them carefully together in her black silk apron.

She peered into closets, looked under the bed—thereby knocking her cap on one side which gave her a curiously distraught and rakish appearance—there was not a single spot in the whole room that escaped her scrutiny, but whatever she might have been looking for she certainly failed to find it. There was not even the orthodox letter fastened to the pincushion to tell why and where she had gone.

For a moment Miss Kiljoy was overwhelmed. It could not be true that the girl had really run away! And yet she

could not disbelieve the evidence of her senses, and with the exception of that little blue slipper and an old, grey, stuff dress, which she had many and many a time rebelled against having to wear—it being fashioned in a by-gone mode, and distasteful to dainty Gladys—which hung on a peg behind the door, the whole of her wardrobe had disappeared too. But how? That was what puzzled the spinster. Had she a spy in the house, a traitor in the camp? Firkins! No. One recollection of her maid's scared, inquisitive visage dispelled that idea. And it certainly could not be cook, who was old and ungainly, and the last person in the world to assist in such an escapade; moreover, she was deaf; no, nor yet Bessy, who, although prone to linger when despatched on

errands had a very wholesome dread of her mistress's sharp tongue, and would never have been persuaded into such a direct piece of disobedience, Miss Kiljoy felt persuaded. So far as a lady can depend on the constancy and goodwill of her dependants, Aunt Tabitha believed that she could rely on the members of her household. "And that little wretch Ruth has not got it in her power to help, or she would have done it fast enough," she said aloud.

And then she picked up the slipper from the floor, threw the despised grey gown over her arm, opened the window, and tossed out the withered roses; and left the room, locking the door behind her, and taking the key.

As yet, she could hardly realise the

enormity of the offence. Where in all the world could the child go to, for she knew no one in London. Stay—Diana Sourby ! Miss Kiljoy recalled her niece's disappointment when she was prohibited from accepting the invitation she had received some time since. Downstairs stumped Miss Kiljoy, with her cap awry, and an odd trembling at the corners of her mouth.

Firkins, who had been hovering on the stairs, slunk away on catching sight of her mistress's face, and running into the kitchen announced solemnly—" Miss Vaughan have *hanteloped* ! "

And while her fellow servants were struck dumb with surprise, and poured forth questions which, as we know, Firkins was totally unable to answer, and expressed their several opinions on the step the

young lady had been. According to their different temperaments and tastes, Miss Kiljoy sat in the dining-room, pen in hand, composing a telegram, whilst ten minutes later she took herself to the nearest office. She went alone, and when Firkins helped her to put on her bonnet and mantle, there was something so new and startling in the old lady's face that sealed the lips of her maid, bristled at curiosity though she was. She had rushed to answer her mistress's bell, determining to satisfy herself by a few pointed questions, but that grey white face, firmly set lips, and shaking hands half frightened Firkins, and the hall door closed on Aunt Tabitha, without a single syllable having passed between herself and her maid.

Miss Kiljoy did not return home after

her telegram was safely on its way. That quiet house was more than she could bear just then, so she called a cab, and told the man to drive her quickly to "Sans Egal" Lodge, Penge.

CHAPTER II.

" I never saw a bridal but my eye-lid had been wet,
For it always seemed to me as tho' a joyous crowd had met
To see the saddest sight of all, a gay and girlish thing
Lay aside her maiden happiness for a name and for a ring."

It was a long drive, and Miss Kiljoy had ample time to think over the disastrous event that had taken place, and to consider how best to break the intelligence to Nancy, for speak to some one about it poor Aunt Tabitha felt that she *must*. Her head fairly swam with mingled emotions and surmises, and when at length they paused before the very small house which its occupant had honoured with so grand an appellation, she was able to do little more than drop the man's fare into his hand, and walk slowly up the path to the house.

Nancy saw her coming, as, feather brush

in hand, she flicked off invisible specks of dust from the old china, which, as she would proudly have told you, “belonged to my grandfather, the Admiral !”

“Tabitha ! why, what brings you here at this hour ?”

In an instant the gloves that adorned the virgin’s hands, to preserve what little whiteness they could ever have had to boast of, were flung behind the sofa, where they lie together with a blue and white check apron, the feather brush descending on them with a sudden thud, and Miss Nancy herself advanced to the door to greet her friend.

Perhaps she was a trifle more dignified than usual—she had neither forgotten nor forgiven the affront she had received at their last meeting, so she infused a certain

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amount of restraint into her manner as she extended her hand.

But one look into Tabitha's perturbed features showed plainly there was something terribly wrong, and in a trice all the unpleasantness and coldness vanished from her voice and the anger and pride from her heart; for if Miss Payne had a scrap of feeling for any being on earth, saving herself, it was for Tabitha Kiljoy, and never since she had known her—and I am quite sure that Nancy would not like to confess how long that had been—had she seen the lady look as she did now.

Sundry calamities shot through Nancy's fertile brain—was the house in Brunswick Square burned down, or had the burglars returned and carried off the solitary diamond stud, so dear to Tabitha's heart,

and which she had actually been heard to say that she considered it of greater value than—the Admiral's china ? Had—oh, dreadful thought—the ghost been seen again ? Strange to say, sagacious though she had declared herself to be, spite of her clear sightedness and keenness, her thoughts never reverted to Miss Vaughan at all."

" My poor dear, what is it ?" leading Miss Kiljoy carefully into the room as if she were a pet lamb with a ribbon, seating her with extreme caution and deliberation on the sofa, as if she feared lest any sudden shock should scatter her into little bits, and unfastening her bonnet strings, with tender solicitude—

" What is it, Tabitha ? "

In the midst of her distress, Miss Kiljoy felt tempted to retort—" As you are so

“You will be surprised to hear that such a woman as this would not be contented with the usual of the lower & lower middle, and even without the regular incidents of the marriage with a sort of outward show of respect for a lower middle standing with a sort of steady respect.”

Miss Tope hadly permitted her friend to describe her friend—

“You need to tell me that she has gone?”

“I think so.”

“An unpleasant little thing! But you are well out of her; she has been an eternal torment ever since she set her foot in Brunswick Square.”

It was perfectly true; Miss Kiljoy did not feel in the least disposed to deny it, nevertheless in her secret soul something

whispered consciously that Gladys had not spent an enviable life beneath her roof. "But where is she?" she said testily, "she might have had the grace to leave a line to let me know what she meant to——. Oh, Nancy," with a sudden stretching out of her hands, "You—you don't think that she has—"

"No, I don't" replied Nancy, stoutly; "most decidedly not! Gladys Vaughan is not the style of girl to throw herself off London Bridge just because she could not have her own way; she was the veriest little plague that ever existed, but she had more sense than to do a thing of that sort. Besides, it would be no easy matter to put an end to her existence, unless she impaled herself on the railings in the Square, or tied herself to the bed post with her neck

ribbons. Don't let yourself be worried on that account."

Miss Kiljoy felt almost comforted, certainly very much reassured at the contemptuous tone and light banter her friend employed. Nancy was not often wrong. Had she not darkly hinted that something disagreeable would occur before long, and advised her to keep an eye on her niece?

"Oh, if only I had paid heed to what she said, this might never have happened," groaned Aunt Tabitha, but she could not be brought to acknowledge this omission on her part, and after a few moments spent in staring at the flies that buzzed hither and thither, she commenced weakly—"If she—if I—oh Nancy, if only I knew where she was."

“ Now, look here, Tabitha, listen to a little common sense. You never liked the girl, she just wore the flesh off your bones with anxiety and worry, and now she is gone, and a good riddance too, and there is an end of the bother ; you surely won't be such a simpleton as to fret yourself into your coffin because you don't know *how* and *where* she has gone. She'll be safe to let you know in a day or two. And if you have seen the last of her, I am very much mistaken ; she'll turn up, like a bad half-penny, just when you least want her, or my name is not Nancy Payne.”

And then Tabitha bethought her of her telegram, and whispered a faint hope that she might have taken refuge with her Aunt Sourby.

“ My dear, that is the most sensible thing

"You have said so often, I began to think
you had quite lost your head. I wonder I
did not wonder more than myself. But seeing
you in this sad state, quite amused me, I
thought, 'I will let them Miss Payne's
servant woman come never deserted her,
but in the morning multiplied herself on an
emergency like the present; and she added
quickly—

"I'll just put my running up and go with
you to Brunswick Square, and by the time
we reach there, we shall probably find an
answer for you."

And when the two ladies arrived, it was
as Miss Payne had prophesied. There was
a yellow envelope on the mantel-shelf in the
dining-room, and with fierce impatience
Miss Kiljoy tore it open, and then let it
fall with a sigh of disappointment. Nancy

pounced on it—"Not here—have heard nothing. What is wrong?"

So she had let them all into the secret for nothing!

Heartily did the poor old lady wish that she had worded her missive a trifle more vaguely, yet she had felt so convinced that Gladys would be there, and had not thought it worth while to resort to subterfuge.

And now Nancy set her wits to work in right good earnest, beginning to fear there was more in this than appeared on the surface.

"Ruth!" she cried suddenly, with quite a little shriek of delight at her own cleverness, that caused Miss Kiljoy to spring from her chair, and cast an aggrieved look at her boisterous companion. "That is it

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depend upon it—she is with Ruth!” and she clapped her little plump hands together joyfully, offering to start at once on a journey of investigation. But this Tabitha would not permit ; she was far too much excited to sit still, and although Nancy really believed that the old lady was not able to stand any more fatigue, and begged of her to rest, poor Aunt Tabitha absolutely refused to be left alone, and the two spinsters trudged off once more together. It was past three o’clock when they reached Clapham, and then, in her agitation, Miss Kiljoy could not recall the number. “ But I can find the house,” she said, “ for I remember counting the flower pots in the opposite window.”

But they had traversed the street twice before she at length paused, thinking she

had found it. Miss Payne let off a little superfluous feeling on the unoffending knocker, and it resounded through the house, bringing the neighbours to their windows, and a very fat greasy, rubicund woman to the door.

“Are you the landlady?” put Miss Payne.

“Yes, ma’am. Did you please to want apartments?”

“No!” shortly, “I wish to see Ruth Ruddock!”

“Then you’ll have to go farther, I guess, for she ain’t here,” returned the woman, dropping her thin cloak of fawning civility, as soon as she found there was nothing to gain by it, and that these ancient dames were not possible lodgers for her first floor back room.

“What! Does she not live here?”

“She did, ma’am, but she left yesterday hafternoon.”

Miss Kiljoy put out a hand to steady herself, and grasped tightly the iron railings. The landlady recognised her.

“You are the lady as come to see her, I bethink me?” she asked interrogatively. “Why, it were that very day, an hour or so arter you were gone, that she give me notice—‘this day week, Mrs. Sykes,’ says she.”

Then it was all a preconcerted plan, and she herself had been an unconscious accomplice to it! Miss Kiljoy could have ground her accessory teeth with rage.

Miss Payne thanked the landlady for the information she had given, and turned without leaving the half-crown that that

estimable woman thought she was well justified in expecting for her condescension in standing at her front door conversing for five minutes or so.

“And you are sure you don’t know where she has gone?” Miss Payne turned back on the pavement to ask.

“No, I don’t, and I wouldn’t tell you if I did!” she added insolently, slamming the door to with angry violence. “Folks must pay for what they want to know,” and wiping her heated countenance with an apron that, to say the least of it, did not tend to improve her physiognomy, Mrs. Sykes retreated to the lower regions.

Miss Kiljoy and her companion looked blankly at one another.

“What is to be done now?” asked Tabitha.

“Go home and become ‘Micawbers’ for the time being—wait for whatever may turn up.” returned Nancy bitterly, although she was every whit as puzzled and bewildered as her friend. “You are fit for nothing but your bed,” she added, looking pityingly into the tired, worn face; “that girl will be the death of you before she’s done.”

So home they went once more, and the astute Firkins guessed rightly that her mistress knew no more of Miss Vaughan’s whereabouts than she did when first they found her missing.

Meanwhile Miss Kiljoy’s niece was Gladys Vaughan no longer, but had exchanged her own name for that of Nairn, and had entered on her new life in blissful unconsciousness that she could have acted

foolishly, and with never a doubt as to whether she should be any happier in the new life than she had been in the old.

Late on the evening of her flight came a thundering knock at the hall-door, which caused Miss Nancy, who had been nodding and dozing over a piece of needlework, to start bolt upright and look around her. Firkins brought in a large square envelope on a silver salver and retreated, applying her ear to the key-hole that *her* curiosity might be gratified as well as that of her betters. But all she gained was a cold in her ear that caused it to swell and throb painfully for the next day or two, for what passed between the ladies might have been Hebrew for its intelligibility to the maid.

Miss Kiljoy read the note through very slowly, seeing that it only contained three

lines, and then handed it to the now wide-awake Nancy.

“A pretty state of things,” said she, scornfully.

“AUNT TABITHA—

“I have been so perfectly wretched in Brunswick Square that I have resolved to bear it no longer, and as soon as it can be arranged I am going back to papa in Calcutta.

“GLADYS.”

That was all! Miss Kiljoy gazed in dire distress and helpless consternation at her friend, without a word.

“I suppose it had better be destroyed,” said the lady quietly, as she took up the letter and held it to the flame of the candle.



But Tabitha broke into a sudden flood of tears.

“The Colonel!” she sobbed, “oh, what will the Colonel say?”

I am afraid Miss Payne did not altogether bless the Colonel, but, being a lady, of course she did not say so; she seized a smelling bottle and held it to Miss Kiljoy’s nose, but it was of little use; anger, excitement, fear, and the unusual fatigue together combined, had for once got the mastery over the poor old lady, and in five minutes more she did what in all her life she had never been guilty of before—yielded to a violent fit of hysterics.

CHAPTER III.

"It is the little rift within the lute
That by-and-bye will make the music mute."

DID Gladys regret the step she had taken? Did she repent her of her disobedience? Not yet! She has been married just one week, and the glamour of love still hangs over her. The feeling of independence, to which she has so long been a stranger, is so perfectly delightful, that she whispers to herself again and again that never in her life has she been so happy; she is free to go where she will. No Aunt Tabitha to raise her eyebrows in amazement at her actions. But, ah, me! there is more than this required to make married life a truly happy one; and when the eighth day came round, Gladys began dimly, vaguely, to

realise and understand, for the first time, what her position as a wife really was, and that she was no longer the petted spoiled plaything of an hour. Lionel was not a perfect character any more than you or I are : he had foibles and follies like all the rest of us, and his wife began to find it out. Perhaps his most dominant failing was the wish to rule—no one must oppose or object in the slightest degree to any thing he chose to fancy. Now it mattered very little to Gladys whether they should spend their time in boating, riding, driving, or walking. Ventnor was charming, everything was new and agreeable, and she acquiesced with ready tact to all he proposed, it being all one to her.

But there came a time when she expressed a desire antagonistic to the plan

Lionel had mapped out for the day's amusement. This is how it happened.

Early breakfast was over, and Gladys had run quickly upstairs, while Lionel, newspaper in hand, stood by the window whistling softly to himself, when the door flew open, and a merry voice cried—

“Come Lionel, let us go down to the shore.”

“What, now?” he asked. “Oh, no, certainly not, Gladys; you must not think of such a thing! You would be quite tired out. Do you forget that we are going over to see that old castle to-day?”

“I don't care about ruins,” she answered, wilfully, twirling her sun hat round and round in her fingers, “we will give up the idea, Lionel, and you must come out with

me instead ; it is the very morning for a ramble."

But he turned away, while a look of annoyance clouded his handsome features.

"Come !" she urged, laying her hand on his arm.

He drew a little away from her, saying huskily—

"I intend to carry out our original plan."

She was not quick to take offence, as many another woman, less sweet than she was, would have been inclined to do, so she opened her large eyes, while a look of wonder and pain stole over them.

"Without me, Lonie !"

He did look up then, for he loved her after his own feeble, weak fashion, and the cloud on the horizon melted away under

the influence of her gentle touch and reproachful eyes. Nevertheless, Lionel carried his point, persisting that it was too hot to walk, that by-and-bye it would be more sultry still, and that under the circumstances a drive would be far pleasanter ; and, with just a little sigh, Gladys yielded, but not the less did she remember that the first time she had expressed a wish, it had been disregarded.

She was, like all gentle womanly women, sensitive to a degree, and she would have suffered a great deal before she would have let him know that she felt disappointed and grieved, and she took herself sharply to task for allowing such thoughts and feelings to have sway with her, when Lionel bent his brow over her troubled face and kissed the sweet lips.



Yes, it was *she* who had been in the wrong, she told herself with grave humility, she ought not to have interfered with Lionel's plan. He had arranged that they should spend the day away from Ventnor, and she had been foolish to raise an objection—and, “when he is so good to me, too,” with a quick upward glance at the smiling face beside her.

But Ruth Ruddock, not being Mr. Nairn's wife, saw things in a clearer light, and almost before the close of the first week she had come to a somewhat hasty conclusion that her young lady's husband was both selfish and exacting, and “if so be it should prove she has made a mistake, what then?”—Ruth's honest loving heart sank within her, and she caught her breath with a little gasp—“it will be *I* who have done

it, for she would never have married him, but for my help and persuasions.’”

Ruth had ample leisure for reflection ; she was left a good deal alone, and so long as Gladys’ voice was gay and careless, and all was well with her, she did not complain. Gladys seemed joyous enough, certainly ; she would chatter delightedly of all she had seen in their strolls and rambles, as she had been wont to do when under Miss Kiljoy’s roof, and yet—Ruth closed her hand over sundry sheets of foreign paper with which her pocket was crammed—“I’m not at all sure as I’m in a hurry to go and do likewise,” says she, dubiously.

* * * * *

“Lonie, when will you take me back to India ?”

It was a glorious evening, and our hero and heroine sat with open windows reveling in the cool, soft air, so welcome after the scorching heat of the day.

“When?—oh,” with a slight pause, “when I can afford it,” carelessly knocking off the ash from his cigar.

“But—but—I don’t understand! Does it take such a very great deal of money?” anxiously.

“Lots!” he replied, more forcibly than elegantly.

She sighs wistfully.

“Are you not happy—not content?” with sudden distrust—“why do you want to go back, child?”

With keen reproach in her voice and manner, she cries—

“You *know* that I am quite content; it

is not *that*, but—" she lays her head on his shoulder, and bursts into tears.

"Why, what ails my little wife?" drawing her closely to him, and she resolutely dashes the rain drops away.

"I am a terrible baby," she says, playfully, struggling for composure.

"Gladys, you would not cry without some grave cause; what is the matter, darling?"

"Indeed, I don't know myself. I suppose I am tired, and sometimes I feel as if—as if—as though I could not live any longer without papa!"

"Precisely what I suspected. We have only been married ten days, and already you feel that I am not sufficient for your happiness."

"Oh, Lonie—hush!" putting her hand on his lips.

But he felt himself aggrieved and, man-like, resolved that she should know it.

“ Well,” he answers, irritably, “ as a rule brides don’t indulge in weeping when they are wholly, and unexceptionally happy ! It is a pity that it is too late to undo it now.”

She raised her head without a word from its resting-place, her heart full of a new feeling of bitter injustice, and weary aching. He was ashamed of himself, and would have recalled his angry words if he could, yet he could not bring himself to proffer the amend for which she was waiting so yearningly. The evening shadows stole around them, and the waves washing the distant shore echoed drearily—“ too late ! too late ! ”

Gladys sobbed herself to sleep that night,

while Lionel smoked reflectively on the balcony, vowing to himself that never again would he use a harsh word to her whom he loved (next to himself) best of all the world. She was asleep when he joined her, and as he touched her tear-stained face with his lips, he started back as if she had dealt him a blow.

“What a brute I am!” he muttered, savagely, but she slept on, unconscious of his self-reproach, which was all that was necessary to restore the broken peace between them.

Two days after this, as they turned a sharp angle on the cliffs, they found themselves face to face with a gentleman, a tall, well-made man, with keen black eyes. He raised his hat politely, but with an angry exclamation Lionel hurried on.

“Is that anyone you know?” asked the girl, in surprise.

But he parried the question, and seeing that he was unwilling to answer it, she allowed it to drop; but he chafed and fumed the whole afternoon, and, although Gladys was anxious to go out again after their early dinner, he negatived the proposal in such a decided way that she had no choice but to yield. A frown puckered her forehead as she stood looking wistfully out over the blue sea. Why was Lionel so perverse? It was a shame to stay indoors on such a lovely day.

After tea, candles were brought in, and the room felt so stiflingly hot that Gladys could bear it no longer, and, rising hastily, she threw open the window, and was about

to step on the balcony, when her husband's voice arrested her.

"Don't go out, Gladys, and do shut that window, there is a most confounded draught."

She obeyed at once, only saying surprisedly—"Draught, dear? why, we have had it open every night!"

But he relapsed into silence. How dull it was, thought the girl; nothing to do, and Lionel so cross. Once she made up her mind to creep to his side, and throwing her arms round him, try to woo him back to good humour, but his face was so forbidding, as he sat with a book open on the table before him, and his elbows resting beside it, that she did not venture to interrupt him. The hours dragged on, until nine o'clock struck, and then looking up

hastily, and catching his wife's enquiring look, he said—"Go to bed, dear; it is getting late."

She went round to his side then, and touched his forehead with her lips, but he made no response to the mute caress, as she half hoped he would do, and with a sigh she went away to her own room.

"You and the master haven't been out near so much to-day," remarked Ruth, as she busied herself in making things tidy.

"No, and yet I am very tired," said Gladys, wearily.

Ruth looked at her mistress for a moment with a dim foreboding that something was wrong, but Gladys turned away impatiently from the scrutiny, and the kind-hearted girl, with a brief good-night, went downstairs and left her alone.

And then Gladys sprang from her bed, feeling too restless and uneasy to lie there, and throwing a warm wrapper about her, she cautiously opened the window ; the cool night air fanned her heated brow. What a glorious night it was—the velvet pall creeping slowly up over the heavens, and the golden stars twinkling right merrily, “each on its tiny throne” ; so still, with the hum of many waters in the distance, and the faint rustling of leaves around her. And Lionel had fancied it was cold ! Why, what could ail him ? Surely he must be ill, pondered the girl, with a quick feeling of dread, mingled with compunction that she had felt irritated and vexed even for one moment ; but if—the unmistakeable perfume of a cigar, and a familiar tone caused her to start back. Her husband stood on



the balcony beneath her window, and evidently he was not alone, for she could hear another voice, though she could not distinguish the words. How strange! Then he was not ill as she had feared, but had *only* been indifferent to going out with *her*—that was all. And his companion, whoever he might be, kept well in the shadow, but that he was of the masculine gender Gladys felt assured, for two bright red spots from two respective cigars gleamed through the darkness.

“Pshaw! Claude, you are a fool.” Lionel’s voice raised a trifle higher, and evidently in anger, made the above sentence distinguishable.

“Claude!” Gladys was fairly puzzled. To the best of her belief Lionel did not know a soul in Ventnor, excepting the

gentleman who had raised his hat to them on the cliff, and it was a perfect mystery. "Lionel has no right to keep secrets from me," she thought, with a funny little, assumption of wifely dignity, "and I'm sure if he doesn't want me to know things I don't care a straw about hearing them." And with a sudden click and something very like tears in her bright eyes, she let down the window, and crept shiveringly back into bed. Perhaps the delinquents below were startled, for not five minutes later Lionel himself entered, candle in hand.

"Is anything the matter?" he asked.

"No—why?" she answered quickly, making up her mind to say nothing of what she had seen and heard. If *he* had secrets he would find that *she* could have them too.

Putting the candlestick on the dressing table, he regarded the latch of the window suspiciously, but made no further remark.

For a long time Gladys lay quiet, her heart beating thick and fast. She could not believe that he really meant to keep his own counsel, and that she was to be kept in ignorance as to this nocturnal visit. But he made no attempt to break the silence.

“And so we are to begin our married lives with a secret a-piece,” she thought, bitterly, while she turned and tossed, wooing in vain the coy goddess, who refused to come at her bidding. And Lionel, believing that he had been mistaken in fancying he saw the window open, slept peacefully.

CHAPTER IV.

"I could not weep, so soft his sleep,
For fear t'would waken him;
Peace! let him rest, God knoweth best,
And the flowing tide comes in."

THINGS went on from bad to worse. It seemed to Gladys that instead of growing "nearer and dearer with each successive day," she drifted further and further from her husband's heart. He was completely changed. Moody and silent, disinclined to go out, fidgetty and uneasy when indoors, Gladys' heart fairly ached. That there must be a cause for all this she knew, but what could it be.

Once, in a flood of emotion, she begged of him to take her back to India, and he answered her sadly enough that he would

give anything to be able to do so, but that he had not the means.

“Then write home,” she pleaded, tearfully, “I am sure papa would send us money.”

“I have written,” he answered, shortly.

“And you never told me, Lonie?” The reproach in her tone hurt him, and he bit his lip savagely.

They were standing together by the window, and Gladys suddenly caught sight of the same man who had claimed acquaintance with her husband some days previously, and with an impulse she regretted a moment later, she cried—
“Look, Lionel, is not that the same gentleman who—” but he seized her arm, pulling her away with some violence, and when in surprise and dismay she

looking up at him, his face was white as death.

"Don't go to the window again," he said sternly, as he left the room.

"What does it all mean?" cried the poor child, pitifully, as she heard the front door shut sharply, and knew that he had left the house. And then she closed her lips resolutely, and went up to her own room with a hard, cold look creeping over her young face, resolving she would not come down again until he should fetch her. But he did not come, and she sat in the dusk, dim light, utterly miserable and woe-begone. Where was the brightness of her first few married days? Where was the contentment that had rested on her life then? Gone, gone!

At last she could bear it no longer, the



solitude became unendurable, and stealing downstairs, she opened the door of the little sitting-room, and coming swiftly to where her husband sat, lost in thought and seemingly unconscious of her presence, she threw herself on his breast, and in a torrent of tears and sobs, she begged him to love and trust her.

“Child, child—my little Gladys—” his voice softened and faltered. “Can it be possible that you doubt my exceeding love for you; I, who love you only too well?”

“Too well?” she asked simply; “*can* a man love his wife too well?”

He put his hand over his eyes, perhaps to shut out the vision of her pale, sad face. “It is almost more than I can bear!” he said.

She did not understand him, poor child,

how should she? But she could see that something grieved and troubled him, and, woman-like, she yearned to comfort.

"Tell me all about it, darling," she urged.

"Gladys," and he paused; "if there was something that I knew and had not told you, because the telling of it would pain and grieve you to no purpose, you—you—"

"I should still wish to know it," she answered firmly, raising her sweet face, with a new light breaking over it. "I am your wife, Lionel, and must take my share of what ills may fall to your lot; we will bear them together, darling."

He bent over and gathered her closely to him, closer, closer. "If you will have it so," he whispered, and his voice was hoarse and broken; "but not now, not to-night

—I will tell you all to-morrow.” His lips closed over hers as if to still the rebellious —“ No, no ! tell me now, Lionel,” that she would have uttered, and she was fain to be content with his promise, believing, with all the force of her sanguine child-like nature, that the shadows which had darkened her life would melt away, the sun gleam forth once more, and the broken peace return again.

But when the morning came, and she woke with a start to find it much later than her usual hour for rising, Lionel was not beside her. She rose hastily, and hurried over her toilet, vexed that she should have slept so long, with a certain troubled remembrance of the ill-news she had to hear, and a childish eagerness to get it over as soon as possible. But the

sitting-room was empty. Ruth had not seen her master, his hat was not in the hall.

“Then he has gone out, and perhaps he won’t be back to breakfast,” sighed Gladys, regretfully.

At ten o’clock everything was ready, the cloth spread, the urn hissing right merrily, and Gladys herself, arrayed in the daintiest of white cambrics, with soft lace, and palest rose-tinted ribbons, hovering between the window and the door expectantly.

Half-past, and still he did not come.

Gladys rang the bell and ordered the coffee and eggs downstairs ; she could not sit down alone.

Time went by, where could he be ?

Then Ruth came to know what were her

mistress's plans for the day, but Gladys waved her impatiently away.

"How can I tell, Ruth? You must wait until Mr. Nairn comes in."

Eleven o'clock, the breakfast still untasted, and Gladys still watching, sick with suspense and a half defined dread, for the form she was never to see in life again, for the voice that never, through all time, would fall on her ears more.

But as yet she knows it not; thinks him unkind and unthinking, in that he has left her for so long, on this morning of all others when he must have known how anxious she would be to see him.

It is hard to be patient, poor lonely child, and the morning grows into afternoon, and the afternoon in its turn gives place to evening, and when the shadows begin to

fall, she turns, with a look of awe creeping over her young face, to Ruth, who, since the mid-day meal was sent away untouched, has watched by her mistress's side.

"There—there is nothing to be afraid of Ruth, is there?"

Oh, the pitifulness of the wintry smile, oh, the unutterable plaintiveness of the young voice she strives to steady.

Ruth does not answer. What can she say? She can only hope.

"We will go out, I think,—we—we might meet him coming home." She is eager to be doing something—anything will be better than sitting with folded, idle hands, starting at every footfall, trembling at every sound.

Ruth fetches her hat and jacket, and together the two women make their way

down to the beach. The tide is coming in, and there are dark clouds overhead, and as Gladys accosts an old fisherman standing idly by his boat, he shakes his head vehemently, evidently thinking that she is asking him to take her out.

“No, no Miss! there be too many sea-gulls about; we’re a going to have a roughish night.”

“It is not that,” and her voice sounds strangely calm compared with the tumultuous beating of her heart; “have you seen—do you know if a gentleman went out this morning—tall and—and fair?”

“A many, Miss.” The old man regards curiously the white oval face. “But they all come back agin, there aint a boat out now. Is it anyone you are looking for, Miss?” moved by pity for the haunting

dread in the large eyes fixed on him so despairingly.

"My husband," she says, as she turns away.

Where are they to go now? It is growing dark—was not that a splash of rain? Surely,—and there is another.

"Oh, come home, ma'am," cries Ruth, brokenly, "we can't do no good, and may be Mr. Lionel may have arrived."

Gladys looks quickly into her face, and hurries onward. Perhaps! who can tell. She had not thought of that—he may return and find her absent—no loving smile to welcome him, no gentle reproachful words to chide his long absence.

With this thought in her breast she speeds along, and Ruth has much ado to keep pace with her.

There is a little crowd outside the door, but she does not notice it, and they are in the midst, before, with a loud cry, Ruth pulls her back,—too late! In an instant she has thrown off Ruth's detaining hand, and darted forward,—she is kneeling beside him—that cold, inanimate form has taken the limp hand in hers, flung herself on his breast, and with her warm lips pressed to his cold features, learns that—he is dead.

“Lionel—husband!”

God help her. Wild cries and sobs burst from Ruth, as the crowd make way for her and she stands beside her mistress.

“Is she dead?” Ruth looks up hurriedly into the face of her questioner. “No sir, she has only fainted.”

The stranger stoops and lifts the slight

Arm of Lionel's young wife in his strong arms, and bears her into the house.

"Oh, my poor young lady," sobs Ruth.

For all answer he makes, he might have been carved out of stone, gazing down on the white rigid face, and dark-fringed eyelids, with God knows what of pity stirring at his heart ; and again Ruth cries aloud—"It will kill her—so fond as she was of him, too."

"What sort of stuff was he made of, I wonder," he mutters, "so young, and so exquisitely beautiful."

Ruth catches the last word—"Beautiful—she used to be, but she's ten years older than she was ten days ago—before he married her."

He starts violently—"What?"

"I say that two weeks ago, come to-

morrow, she was an innocent loving child, and now, thanks to—Hush! she is coming back to life again. Go—please to go, sir.”

And Gladys' weary eyes unclosed, and meet for one instant's space the stranger's gaze—and that day on the cliffs, the last morning of the few happy hours of her wedded life, comes back to her memory, and she stretches out her hand to wave him from her, but he has already gone.

CHAPTER V.

"Learn not to be greedy; and when you've enough,
Don't be anxious your bags any tighter to stuff."

INGOLDSBY LEGENDS.

"DINAH, I look upon this as an especial call, and if you persist in neglecting it you will do very wrong."

"Simon, I wonder at you, that I do. You are worse than the very worms, for they *will* turn when they are trodden on, but you—you—. Oh, I can't talk about it; but if you think that I can pocket insults in the way that you do, and think no more about the matter, you are sadly mistaken. And go to see Tabitha after the disgraceful way in which she has treated me the last one and twenty years, I *will* not. I hope I have more pride!"



Mrs. Sourby's face flushed a dull red, and her eyes brightened angrily.

Mr. Sourby murmured something about "pride going before destruction," but he did not finish his sentence, his wife crying irately, "Don't quote Scripture, its downright profane, that's what it is, Mr. Sourby; the devil does that."

"My—my dear!" Simon Sourby's breath almost fails him, and he puts his hand on the back of a chair to steady himself, looking over his shoulder apprehensively the while, as if he half feared lest his satanic majesty should be within hearing.

Meanwhile Mrs. Sourby's youngest daughter, Charity, who, while this somewhat stormy altercation has been in progression, has been employing herself in

counting the stitches on a coarse woollen sock she is knitting, now lays her work down and joins the fray, taking her mother's side.

"Really, papa," she chirps, "I do not wonder that ma won't go to see Aunt Tabitha, after the way in which she has held herself aloof from us all these years. I think it is only natural that she should feel as she does."

After which amiable and charitable speech she subsides into silence, ignoring the grateful glance her mother throws to her.

"You had better leave the room," said her father, pompously; "it is not proper that children should dictate to their parents on matters of which they are totally incompetent to judge."

And, with a toss of her head, Charity obeyed.

For some moments after the door closed Simon Sourby stood meditatively by the fireplace, then he crossed over to his wife's side, and in his oiliest, silkiest tones, said—

“Dinah, just pay a little attention to what I have to say. You are a woman of sound common sense, and I am sure it only requires that the matter should be set clearly before you, to induce you to see it in the same light as I do. Your sister has some—some little—hem!—property. Is it not so?”

Mrs. Sourby raised her head and looked into her husband's face before replying.

“We had the same fortune,” she answered grimly.

and bonnet, compose your features into a resigned and saddened humility, and start at once for Brunswick Square. It is wrong to linger, for if she be so near death every fleeting moment is precious. Who can tell what word in season from your lips may not be brought home to—”

“Twaddle!” broke in his wife, contemptuously. “In the first place, I don’t suppose she is in the least degree likely to die at present, and in the second, supposing that she is on the threshold of an unseen world, I don’t think that either you or I can do her much good. In my belief, Tabitha has got the dry wither, and people just live for ever after that.”

Nevertheless, within an hour, Mrs. Sourby, robed in a dismal black gown,

very straight and scanty, and a bonnet divested of every morsel of trimming save a couple of hearse-like plumes, with a rusty black shawl folded over her portly shoulders, found herself on the way to Brunswick Square.

“No, ma’am, my mistress is no better,” was the reply to her query as to how Miss Kiljoy was.

“Is she, then, very ill?” asked Diana, with a sudden awe stealing over her. What if, after all, Simon was right, and Tabitha’s last hours at hand, and her treasures about to pass into the hands of the ungodly?

“I am her sister,” she said, “and should like to see her.”

The maid looked astonished, but after a moment’s hesitation admitted the visitor,

and ushered her into the library with a murmured something about sending Firkins, and departed.

“Not much of any value here,” soliloquised Mrs. Sourby, her keen eye calculating the probable cost of the few articles scattered about the room, and she had barely time to compose her features into a fitting expression of condolence and grief, when Firkins entered, red-eyed and sniffing vigorously.

“You are my sister’s maid?” interrogatively.

“Yes, mum, and more than that, if I may take it upon me so to speak, I am the poor dear lady’s friend.”

“Oh, oh! Another legatee! It is high time indeed that I was here,” thought Mrs. Sourby. Aloud she said, “Indeed!

it must be a trial to you to see her so ill then. How long is it since she was taken ?”

“Well, mum, she’s not bin herself for near upon three months; that’s to say, she’s been ailing like, and that droopy and queer, without a bit of perk or sperrits, but its only a week, come to-morrow, that she took to her bed, and the doctor, he says, as how she won’t never leave it again,” with a frantic application of a much soiled handkerchief to her eyes.

Emotion, however sincere, did not improve Firkins’ personal appearance. After a series of little dabs, she continued—

“I’ve been with her off and on ever since the first; three days and three nights I was hup with her the whole time, until Miss Gladys, who has a feeling ’art,

I *will* say, sent me to bed and watched by her haunt herself.”

There were several queries which Mrs. Sourby was dying to put, and it was with the greatest difficulty that she restrained herself. After a moment's thought she rose.

“Let me have a pen and ink,” she said, “I will send a line to my husband not to expect me home for a day or two, at all events. Miss Vaughan is far too young and inexperienced to have such a responsibility resting on her.”

Firkins had not a word to say. She knew that Miss Kiljoy had dictated a letter to summon her sister, and perceiving that her part was to yield and make the best of a bad matter, she fetched what was required, and stood humbly waiting until the letter was completed.

“You had better prepare my poor sister,” the lady said solemnly; “let her know that I am here and willing to do anything for her, will you? And—yes, perhaps, you may as well send my niece to me at once.”

And so we meet Gladys again.

With a little burst of feeling she threw her arms round her aunt's neck, whispering her gratitude and thankfulness that she had come, before it was too late—“for she is very, very ill,” said the girl.

Mrs. Sourby looked into the thin, worn, white face, marked the tumbled, neglected hair, felt the hot hands tremble in her own, and perhaps came nearer to loving her niece at that moment than she ever did afterwards.

“My dear child, you are completely tired out,” she said, gently, “you ought to have had a nurse for my sister.”

“She will not take anything from anyone else;” tears rose to Gladys’ eyes from sheer weakness and exhaustion. “She will be glad to see you, Aunt Diana, she has spoken of you so often, and the last day or two she has seemed to forget the years that have intervened, and thought of you as a girl again, and talked of you with great affection.”

“It was never Tabitha’s way to show much love or affection for anyone,” retorted Mrs. Sourby, grimly.

“Poor Aunt Tab,” fell involuntarily from Gladys’ lips. “You will forget all that, even as I did, Aunt Diana, when I saw her lying so white and still; you will

remember only that she is helpless and suffering."

"You are a good girl," commented Mrs. Sourby, complacently tapping her niece's cheek. "And now, my dear, if you will kindly give orders that a room be prepared for me, I shall be glad to rest for awhile, before I see Tabitha, for the interview must necessarily be a very trying one."

But when, with a quickly beating heart, Gladys ushered the sisters into each other's presence, the invalid turned her face wearily away from the cold features that looked down upon her, and indignantly protested that they were deceiving her. Why would they not let her see Diana? She wanted Diana, she had something to tell her!

“What is it, dear? Tell me, Tabitha.”

Mrs. Sourby's voice lowered itself in eager, coaxing accents, in anticipation of what that “something” might be, but the sick woman was not to be cajoled.

“No, no; I will tell no one but Diana,” she muttered, and by-and-bye relapsed into unconsciousness again.

“My dear,” said Mrs. Sourby, that evening when Gladys had yielded up her place in the sick chamber to Firkins, at Aunt Diana's particular request, and joined that lady in the library, “my dear, I had a most mysterious telegram from my poor sister some time ago, asking if you were staying with me, and evidently not knowing in the least where you were. What did it all mean?”

Gladys paused a moment. She had been

prepared for some such questioning as this.

“Aunt Diana,” she said, bravely, “it will not surprise you if I tell you that Aunt Tab was very harsh and unkind to me at times. It was her nature—and I really believe she could not help it—but, it was something dreadful to have to live with her; she was both unjust and tyrannical, and at length she sent away from me Ruth, the maid I brought over from India, the only person I cared for in this cold, callous England. Ruth vexed her, and she turned her out of the house. After that things went on from worse to worse, until at length, in very despair, I ran away, and—went to Ruth.”

Mrs. Sourby stared at the girl's glowing conscious face, but Gladys hurried on.

"I--I could not help it, and I just made up my mind to stay with her until I could go back to Calcutta. Oh, you don't know what I went through, Aunt Diana; I bore it as long as I could, and then I took the law into my own hands," suddenly lifting her rosy face and meeting unflinchingly her auditor's scrutinising gaze.

"It was a very wrong thing to do," commented the lady severely, "still I am glad it was no worse. I thought, perhaps, you might have been silly enough to run away and get married; you would not be the first head-strong girl who had taken that way out of her troubles and regretted it for the rest of her life."

"Aunt Tabitha did not allow followers," returned Gladys, demurely.

"So I can well imagine, from what I

remember of her in my own young days," said Mrs. Sourby, with a swift looking back.

In some such fashion as this did Gladys escape the cross-questioning she had so much dreaded. Who was there to betray her? Not a soul on earth, saving herself and Ruth Ruddock, knew the story of her marriage and its disastrous sequel; hence, she must be safe!

CHAPTER VI.

"When I am lying in my silent shroud, will you love me?"

"Will your tears reach my pale face through all the withered leaves that will heap themselves upon my grave?"

"Answer me, oh, answer me!"

It was midnight, and Gladys sat by Aunt Tabitha's bedside watching the laboured breathing and long drawn sighs that ever and anon parted the white lips. How wasted and wan was the poor face, how sharp and angular the frame beneath the coverlid! In very pity tears rose to the soft brown eyes. Dying, as she had lived, unloved and alone, without one friend in whose heart she would leave a void that no one else could fill. Not one? Where, then, was Nancy Payne—the only person in all the world who had ever expressed

affection for the solitary old maid? It was strange, but Miss Kiljoy had never mentioned her name from first to last, and when her niece told of the poor old lady's pitiful distress that she was not admitted to Tabitha's sick room, Tabitha turned away with an impatient "pshaw." And yet Nancy's love was genuine and unfeigned; she had nothing to gain by the spinster's death, on the contrary, she would lose the only friend she had, or cared to have. Yet with all the variable-ness and irritability of sickness, Miss Kiljoy peremptorily refused to see her, and poor Nancy again and again retreated in a flood of tears. Words could not express her astonishment at this treatment. "What have I done, that I should be kept away from her, Gladys?" she asked mournfully,

and the girl, who, from the bottom of her heart, pitied the poor old soul, could only make soft reply.

"She is not herself. I don't think she knows what she is saying, and the doctor will not allow strangers to be admitted."

"Strangers!" with an indignant little scream, which reminded Gladys comically of an outraged cockatoo. "To call *me* a stranger. I who have—has the world gone mad? I never—" indignation filled up the hiatus that emotion refused to supply.

And now, day by day, hour by hour, Tabitha Kiljoy is nearing the shores of the Silent Land, the Great Unknown, and no yearning arms are stretched out to keep her here yet a little longer, no wailing voice breathes the dear name and



wearies Heaven with supplications that she may be spared yet a little longer. Nobody cares ; her hour has come, and she is going, and no heart beats the faster for the dread knowledge.

Lifting her eyes wearily to the quiet face, Gladys starts to see that the sick woman is awake—awake and conscious.

“Gladys.”

The voice, though weak, is far more like her own than anything she has used since her illness.

“Yes, dear Aunt Tab ; can I do anything for you ?” a strange unwonted yearning at her heart quivering in her tone as she speaks.

Aunt Tab moves her hand uneasily, and Gladys lays her own warm one over the stiff numbed fingers.

“ Child, I have missed something out of my life,” says the faint voice ; “ I don’t know how or when, I cannot think clearly, but—”

(Gladys’ eyes moisten.

“ Missed something ? ” she echoes vaguely.

“ Neither husband nor child to smooth my dying pillow,” babbles on the sick woman. “ I must go *there* as I have lived *here*—alone, unblessed, unloved.”

“ Oh, Aunt Tab, *I* love you.”

Gladys falls on her knees by the bedside and holds still closer the limp, nerveless hand.

A warm tinge dyes for the moment the yellow cheek, and her lips move faintly in answering dissent, but the girl does not catch the muttered words.



“See that *you* grasp it, Gladys, that something I have lost, and only now have learned to miss. Don’t let it escape you—someone to love you, child, someone for you to love, little Gladys.”

A great lump rises in the girl’s throat, a lump which threatens to choke her.

“Aunt Tab, are you strong enough to listen to me,” she says hurriedly. “I—I am not what you think me; I—I lied to you the other day when you took me back. I told you I had been staying with Ruth, but it—it was not true, not—not all of it.”

Miss Kiljoy spoke not a word, but her breath came thick and fast, and her eyes fastened greedily on the young face.

And the story goes on disjointedly—of Lionel’s love and their hasty marriage she tells, while the tears fill the beautiful eyes,

from over her shoulder down her bare neck.

"Oh, Aunt Tab, I am the most unhappy woman in God's earth and ought to believe me there is a level of loneliness and a desolation beyond what you and your solitary years can have learned the meaning of, but which I am now tasting, the bitterness of—my husband is dead!"

Still Aunt Tab speaks not, her grasp tightens almost imperceptibly, and a faint quiver passes over her face.

"I could not let you die in ignorance of all this," and Gladys bows her head on the coverlid in shame and self-humiliation.

"Child, send Diana to me."

Gladys springs to her feet.

"Yes, you will not tell her! Oh, you would not be so cruel?"

But a curious expression on the thin face warns her that a change is at hand. To dart to the bell, ring it violently, and fly back to her aunt's side, is the work of a moment. Her lips are moving, and she bends her head to catch the whispered words,

“God guard you, little Gladys.”

They were the last she ever spoke.

When, some few minutes later, Firkins rushed distractedly into the room, Miss Kiljoy lay calm and still, with the ashen hue, that death alone knows, on her quiet features, and Gladys stood motionless with one arm still under the lifeless head.

“Oh, my poor mistress,” shrieked Firkins hysterically, and her tears and lamentations roused Mrs. Sourby, who hastened to the scene, peremptorily ordered Gladys

off to bed, and bid Firkins hold her tongue.

Worn out and overcome by emotion, Gladys made no demur, and the lady locked the door and returned to her own room, where she dressed with more expedition than perhaps she had ever employed in her life before; but Mrs. Sourby knew that there was much to be done, which she was resolved that no one but herself should do. Quietly and stealthily she stole about the house, pulling down blinds, locking drawers, gathering papers together, until the arrival of the medical man summoned her once more to the chamber of death.



CHAPTER VII.

“ Some were born for great things,
Some were born for small,
Some—it is not recorded why
They were born at all.”

“I TOLD you so !” said Mrs. Sourby, as she flung herself angrily into an arm chair, “I told you so !” again triumphantly.

No manner of response did Simon make, walking up and down the room in an agitated, helpless sort of way, washing his hands with invisible soap, and drying them in the air.

“Simon, why don’t you speak ? Where is all your logic now ?”

“Diana, I am not infallible,” unctuously, “if it be ordained that—”

“Rubbish !” energetically. “Just to think of that slip of a girl—well, one

Yours truly and most respectfully,
Wm. Lloyd Garrison

her head, "and from what I have seen of my niece, I think it extremely likely that she will do as she pleases."

"Humph! Diana, didn't the Colonel say something in one of his last letters about *wishing to leave his daughter in our charge?* It seems to me," stroking his chin meditatively, "that I remember something of the sort, don't you?"

Simon's eyes, which had been gazing heavenward, turned to this sublunary sphere once more and settled themselves on his wife's face.

Now Mrs. Sourby most positively did *not* remember any such thing; indeed, she knew perfectly well that Colonel Vaughan had never made the slightest mention of her name, or taken the faintest notice of her whereabouts since the termination of a

certain escapade in her youth, which even now brought the red to her cheek, but in her new character of a good and obedient wife, and seeing plainly what was required of her, she hastened to reply—

“Of course! and when Gladys knows that it was her poor father’s wish, she—” “Oh! how you startled me!” with an impatient shrug of her ample shoulders.

“You were talking of me?” Gladys advanced slowly, and stood in her long black dress, slim and mournful, looking at her aunt and uncle.

“Yes, dear, we were, and perhaps it is as well that you should hear at once what we have to propose.”

Mrs. Sourby settled herself more comfortably in her chair, and waved her niece

to a seat beside herself, but Gladys did not move.

“I—we—that is to say your uncle and I—are willing to offer you a home for the present, my love. You see we are not rich, and we might reasonably have expected that some portion of the poor dear departed’s money,” with a quick dab of her handkerchief to her eyes, “should have come to us, but as Tabitha (very wisely, I have no doubt), thought better to leave it to you, I—we,—that is Simon and I—thought that it would only be fair and just that you should pay some nominal sum—say, a hundred a year, or some such trifle—to us for your board. It would make you feel more independent, too, although the luxury and elegance of the home I offer would—”

Mrs. Sourby having come to the end of her breath, her eloquence come to a full stop. Gladys bent her head.

“Aunt Diana,” she said proudly, “I should scarcely be likely to saddle you with an encumbrance in the shape of a niece, when you have a family of your own ; more especially, as, you so delicately put it, what you looked upon as *yours* has fallen to me, and it was about the last thought in my heart, I assure you, to—”

“Quite proper—ahem !” coughed Mr. Sourby, in the background.

“Say no more, my dear Gladys ; I am sure you will do all that—,” began the relieved matron, but Gladys interrupted her.

“Perhaps I had better tell you at once, Aunt Diana, that I have formed other

plans. I shall go back to my father in Calcutta at once ! ”

The devout Simon fell a step backward, whilst his wife sat bolt upright, and stared at the girl for a moment speechless ; then she stammered—

“ Is it possible ? Do you mean to say—oh, how dreadful ! Is she ill, Simon, or—does she not *know* ? ”

“ Know ! ”—with a cold hand, clutching at her heart,—“ know ! Aunt Diana—what is there to know ? Is it so strange a thing that I should long to go back to my dear father ? ”

Mrs. Sourby’s mercenary and worldly heart was touched, and something very like tears glistened in her eyes as she took the girl’s hand between her own, and said kindly—

“ You have not heard the sad news, my poor orphaned child ? ”

And turning away from the blanched, bewildered face, and speaking more gently than perhaps we could have expected Simon’s wife would do, she told how some some six weeks before news had come to Miss Kiljoy of the sudden death of her brother-in-law from sun-stroke, and never for a moment had Mrs. Sourby doubted but that the sad tidings had been made known to Gladys herself.

“ You forget,” said the girl, without a trace of emotion or feeling in her voice or manner, “ you forget that when I returned to Brunswick Square I found Aunt Tabitha dangerously ill, and that she was only conscious at intervals during the ten days I was with her. Aunt Diana—is it

true? God help me, for I am alone in the world ! ”

“ No child, no ; we will take you home with us ; you will not refuse to come, Gladys dear, when you know that it was your poor father’s wish.”

“ It doesn’t matter,” she answered wearily, “ I don’t think anything matters much now. Oh, why will not God take me, too ? Papa, papa, my darling papa ! ”

But the torrent of tears that came by-and-bye to ease the over-burdened heart were shed on Ruth’s faithful bosom, and no one but the tender-hearted little maid heard the piteous wail of the desolate girl.

“ Ah, me ! she didn’t fret near so much for her dear husband, poor thing,” thought Ruth, as she stood, candle in hand, by the bed where her young mistress lay

sleeping, the tears still wet on her flushed face. "And yet—well, Miss Gladys always was different to other folks, any way."

Yet *was* it so strange a thing that fifteen years of fond care and watchful love should out-balance two short weeks of a feverish fitful happiness?

When Gladys first realised that Lionel was indeed gone from her—when she had recovered in some measure from the terrible shock—her one cry had been for her father; her one thought and wish to go back to India, to the loving kindly heart that beat for her there, and when Ruth had asked her where she would go in the interval that must elapse before the necessary preparations could be made, and her passage secured, she had cried impatiently—"Any where—what did it matter? They would

go to an hotel?" And when Ruth, with wisdom beyond her years, suggested that she should return to her aunt and acquaint her with what had occurred, and remain under her protection for the time being, she had answered wearily—

"Don't vex me, Ruth, with idle talking, I will *never* go back there; she—," and her lips quivered pitifully—"she—hated my darling."

Two days later Ruth came with a grave face to tell of Miss Kiljoy's serious illness, and Gladys, impulsive and tender-hearted, scarce waiting for the termination of Ruth's tale, had put together her few possessions and started off at once for Brunswick Square, and, as we know, found the old lady stretched on a bed of sickness, from which she was never to rise again.

Gladys slipped quietly into her old place and installed herself as head nurse, and Miss Kiljoy looked gratefully into the young face, and blessed the gentle hand that ministered to her wants so ably and untiringly.

Once or twice Gladys caught herself wondering vaguely if she could ever have been away—if it had not all been a dream ; and then she drew from its hiding place the golden circlet that proved it was no dream, but sad reality. And now—she is alone, indeed ! Husband, father—both taken !— widowed, orphaned ! God had seen fit in His inscrutable wisdom to afflict her very heavily, and Gladys' heart was well-nigh broken.

One stipulation she made before she agreed to go to Jordan House, and that

was that Ruth should accompany her. At first Mrs. Sourby objected, but finding that her niece was willing to pay anything that that lady should think right, she yielded, and on the day after the funeral Gladys found herself in her new home.

CHAPTER VIII.

"O, the little more and how much it is;
And the little less, and what worlds away!"

"CLADYS, had you ever a lover?"

The girl started violently, while the guilty red rushed to her cheek.

Faith, Hope, and Charity sat around the fireside, lazy for once in the course of their busy lives, for the twilight hour made work impossible, and Charity, who had pricked her finger in her endeavour to fix a small gusset in the coarse common serge on which she was engaged, now threw it down angrily, and asked the above pertinent question.

Now, to say that our heroine was not favourably impressed with her cousins would give but a very slight idea of her

feelings towards them but of the three she decidedly liked Charity the least, and was anything but disposed to yield tender confidences into the austere bosom of the virgin whose tightly compressed lips, waspish temper, and vinegary smile, belied her name twenty times a day.

“Does Aunt Diana permit such unorthodox things?” she asked, evasively.

“Why Gladys, haven’t you learned by this time that mamma is as bent on making good matches as any manœuvring mother in Belgravia?” This from Hope, with a downward curve of her rosy mouth.

“Every mother would like her children to marry well, and be happy, of course,” continues Gladys, reflectively, “but—”

“But what?— but there is no young

man in Hazlewood to flirt with, much less marry—is that what you were going to say, Cousin Gladys? Ah, you are very much mistaken; there is a young man, handsome and eligible, and a very charming fellow, too, but—” Hope looks roguishly in the direction of her youngest sister, “it is as much as your life is worth,” lowering her tone, effectively, “to flirt with him; he is Charity’s own especial—”

“Mr. Langridge!” announced Mary.

Gladys looked up with no little surprise at the stalwart manly figure that crossed the room, and her eye dwelt for a full moment on the winning handsomeness of his face; then, ere her cousins were half-way through their exclamations of delight and astonishment at the young man’s un-



expected appearance, she made good her escape.

On the stairs she met Aunt Diana with a fold of white lace crossed over her everyday dress, and a general look of "titivation" about her, evidently for the visitor's delectation.

"My dear, where are you going?" she asked, as her niece would have passed her. "Nonsense," as Gladys stammered that she did not care about meeting strangers—"Nonsense, Howard Langridge is no stranger; he is quite like one of our own family, and drops in most days when he is at home, but the Squire has been ailing lately, and Howard, like the good son that he is, would not leave his father."

But Gladys would not consent to re-

trace her steps, and went slowly up to her own room, from whence, every now and then, peals of laughter ascended from the quartette below.

Could it really be her prim, old-maidish cousins who were thus making merry? What wonders will not a young and handsome man effect? "And he is handsome," ponders the girl. "I don't think I ever looked into such a pair of brown eyes in my life!" And then she shook herself with a little pettish movement—"What *am* I talking of," she cried aloud, "I will ring for Ruth."

Now Ruth Ruddock's love for her young lady had never been so sorely tried as during the past month at Jordan House. She either could not or would not accustom herself to the quiet life there. Gladys had been

obliged to seriously reprimand her more than once.

On the first occasion Gladys had all but merited a rebuke herself. It was Simon Sourby's custom to have family prayer, morning and evening, which he expected every member of his family and household to attend; and Gladys, all unconscious of the ordeal to which she was about to be exposed, filed in with her cousins, on the first morning after her arrival. But the sight of Simon's portly self flopped down upon his knees, with flabby hands outspread, and countenance upturned, was almost too much for Gladys' gravity; and when, hurriedly withdrawing her eyes, they fell on her three cousins, kneeling bolt upright all in a row—all with hands meekly folded, all in the same brown

holland dresses, *fac similes* of one another, save that Hope's cheeks were a trifle paler than Faith's, and Charity's nose was the least bit in the world more piously inclined heavenward than either of her sisters'—her risible faculties so got the better of her, that she dropped her face in her hands, and surreptitiously stuffed her handkerchief into her mouth. But, as Simon grew more and more impressive, and his voice rose louder and louder, an audible chuckle made itself heard, which Gladys devotedly hoped might come from anybody but Ruth. There was an awful pause, and then a hurried termination to the morning's devotions, for Simon's eloquence had received a shock that would take some little time to repair, and when he scrambled to his feet, his face was flushed and heated, and his hands positively



trembled as he laid the book-marker in its place.

The servants marched out one by one. No need to ask who was the culprit! Every countenance, from that of Mary, the virtuous little housemaid, to the fat pudgy features of Thomas, the eminently proper young man who cleaned the boots, expressed their terror and consternation at their fellow servant's delinquency.

Breakfast passed over in gloomy silence. Furtive glances were exchanged between the Sourby girls and their mother, all of which Gladys saw, but wisely took no notice of; but she could not turn a deaf ear when at length Simon rose, pushed his chair back from the table, buttoned up his coat, cleared his throat, and spasmodically addressed his niece, thus—

“ Gladys, I must beg of you—nay, I must insist that that godless and irreligious young person be severely remonstrated with, and reprimanded for what has never—for what has never, I believe, my dear,” turning to his wife, “ *never* occurred in this house before. If she cannot pay the reverence to holy things that is seemly and right, it were better that she should absent herself from the family altar altogether.”

Gladys apologised for her maid’s inadvertence as well as she could, smothering the twinges of conscience that whispered she had been but one shade less culpable herself.

“ Ruth,” she began, gravely enough when they were alone, “ how *could* you act in the way you did this morning? It really was very wrong of you ! ”

“ Well, Miss Gladys, if you will just tell me how I could help it ; I am sure I didn’t want to ! Don’t you think your uncle looked very like a spread eagle, miss ? ”

Gladys would not smile, she had made up her mind that she ought to be vexed—

“ Very well,” she said, coldly, “ but if you can’t behave properly, you had better stay away altogether, and not disgrace me in this way before everyone. I think it quite right to have family prayer, and shall be sorry if you do not attend, Ruth.”

“ Humbug ! ” said the girl, beneath her breath, but one look at her mistress’s face, and she was repentant enough. “ I didn’t mean that, Miss Gladys ; don’t look grave, please. I only meant that Mr. Sourby—”

“ We will leave Mr. Sourby alone. for

the present, Ruth," said Gladys, "I am seriously displeased with you."

Ruth never misconducted herself in like manner again, you may be sure, and sat during the half-hour, morning and evening, as immovable and stolid as if she had been carved out of stone, and Mr. Sourby soared to blissful heights, and descended to unknown depths, somewhere in the region of his cravat, at his own sweet will, unchecked, and apparently unheeded.

When Gladys went downstairs that same evening, she found her cousins quite on the alert, a pleasant little hum and chatter going on among them, even Aunt Dinah looking cheerful, and in high good humour.

"What is it? what has happened?" asked Gladys.

"Nothing!—yet," said Hope, vaguely,

and Faith nudged her to look at Charity, who, with actually a blush on her yellow cheeks, sat a little apart, pretending she did not hear what was passing around her.

“The girls have had good news,” began Mrs. Sourby, complacently, “a prospect of a little gaiety at the Hall; but you will hear all about it to-morrow, when Mr. Langridge will take tea with us.”

“Mamma,” interrupted Charity, “is it necessary?” and then she, too, paused.

“Oh, I don’t suppose cousin would care to meet *anyone* so soon after her father’s death, and when she is in such deep mourning, too,” echoed Faith.

Gladys looked from one to the other, and then as her glance rested on the troubled face of Aunt Dinah, the spirit of contradiction rose strong within her, and with a

smile, she said—" You are quite right dear Faith, I could not meet strangers at present, or go into society, but as Aunt explained to me an hour or two ago, Mr. Langridge is evidently quite one of the family, and I could scarcely absent myself on his account."

Faith waxed sullen, Hope looked glum, and Charity maintained an injured air for the rest of the evening ; but none of them said another word against her decision.

When Gladys descended to the drawing-room on the following evening, she could scarcely believe the evidence of her senses. Had not her aunt expressly said that no one else was to be invited except Mr. Langridge ? and yet—her cousins were arrayed as if for a ball. It had pained and

grieved Gladys to find that her aunt had no intention whatever of putting on mourning for her sister.

“ Why should I ?” she said, in answer to her niece’s wondering query. “ Tabitha did not leave me a *sous* towards paying for it, and neither Simon nor I are rich enough to afford new black dresses just now, when I have bought winter material for all the girls.”

And so the matter had ended. But this evening the incongruity between her own dress and theirs struck her more forcibly than ever. All three of them wore stiff white, much befurbelowed tarlatans, with sashes of diverse colours—Faith wore blue, Hope pink, and Charity a bright green, and a fillet of the same tint confined her sandy locks,

which had been crimped for the occasion, a strong smell of burnt hair pervading the apartment. Both Hope and Faith had deeply flushed faces, suggestive of much ironing, but all the colour in Charity's elongated visage had crept into the tip of her nose, which burnt furiously, like a beacon amid the prevailing sallowness. Gladys paused—taking in the scene at a glance. There was a general aspect of merry-making about the room itself, for the pinnafores, which had hitherto hidden from curious eyes the pattern of the chairs and sofas, had vanished, and a brilliant yellow was disclosed to the admiring gaze, and sundry finger glasses filled with flowers adorned the mantel-shelf and centre-table. "Why!" Gladys paused, unable to find words polite enough to

express what she wanted to say. Hope looked up radiantly.

“ You have never seen us nicely dressed before, cousin, have you ? I don’t wonder you are surprised,” naively—“ it is not often that we wear our best tarlatan dresses, but mamma thought that on an occasion like this—,” pausing, and looking expressively at Charity, who dropped her head, with its verdant fillet, coyly.

The girls sat in a row on the stiff-backed gaudy sofa, and Gladys, in her simple black dress, with its plain white ruffle at neck and wrists, crossed over the floor, and sat down near the window.

By-and-bye Aunt Dinah appeared, her robust figure and ample proportions multiplied and enlarged in the most bewildering way by a ruby-coloured satin

gave way fall in the vase, and standing some yards behind her. The two women watched Gladys at their elbow to see if she was not lost in admiration at the spectacle of so much grandeur. Probably Gladys was struck dumb, for she made no remark whatever, and her eyes, giving her unprepossessing appearance, shined in a horror-stricken rapture—"Well I must say you *do* look a daisy! If you *are* in black I should think you might make yourself up a bit—a knot of ribbons now, or a bunch of flowers, but—well, I never did see such a fright."

But before Gladys could reply, the door opened to admit the expected guest. The conquering hero had arrived.

There was very little doubt that Howard Langridge was an exceptionally handsome

man. Somewhere about the middle height, with broad, well-shaped shoulders, dark curly hair, and thick bronze moustache and, as Gladys had already discovered, the softest, most expressive pair of brown eyes it had ever been her lot to encounter. Was it fancy, or did a gleam of intense amusement linger there? And the lips under the heavy moustache, did they not droop with concealed merriment? When the buzz, attendant on his arrival, had somewhat subsided, Mrs. Sourby bethought her of an introduction, which she performed in a sort of half-apologetic style—"fearfully dowdy I know, but kindly excuse it."

Gladys looked gravely up into the kindly face, and then turned quickly away, feeling somehow that if she looked much longer, she would be betrayed into a smile. How

Gladys looked back to that evening afterwards, from the vista of long and troublous, and yet not wholly unhappy years, when she could yet remember every trifling detail—the very shade of Aunt Dinah's red gown and Charity's green ribbons, the comical little air of affectation with which Hope set all her ringlets shaking, as she sat down on the music stool, and told her she '*could* not sing the old songs'—an assertion that her cousin cordially acquiesced in—and then how Faith, with many asseverations, that she really did not like to sing after her sister, yielded at last, and whispered confidentially from above the ivory keyboard, that—"her heart, her heart was over the sea!"

How Gladys remembered it all, as if it had been engraven on her memory, even

down to the firm white hand that clasped hers for a moment at parting, while Charity's shrill treble, as she conducted the guest to the hall door, repeated itself in a minor key—"You naughty man!" with suppressed giggles and hysterical laughs.

When the door was shut Howard Langridge lingered under the star-light, battling with a strong inclination to laugh outright. I am not sure that he did not succumb to the temptation, but his dreams that night were haunted—not by the fascinating and frolicsome Charity, but by a certain slim black-robed figure that drew the cords of his life into her slender white hand, and guided them hereafter.

Charity was perverse when she rejoined

her adoring sisters in the drawing-room.

Something either had, or had *not* chanced to her liking in those few moments in the hall, evidently, for when her mother gave vent to a significant—"Well!" she retorted ironically—"Well!"

"Have you nothing to tell us, Charity?" asked Faith in an aggrieved tone.

"Yes; it is a fine moonlight night," returned Charity, taking up her candlestick, and bouncing through the doorway. A moment later she was heard ascending the stairs to the privacy of her own chamber, there to meditate on the falsity and hypocrisy of man, and the fallacy of putting trust in any mother's son of them, to say nothing of the non-reliance to be placed on any hopes and speculations of woman.

Faith and Hope looked blankly at one another. "And so we needn't have put on our best dresses after all !" said one.

"And somebody stupidly upset a cup of coffee over a chair, and I have hopelessly ruined the back breadth of my new gown," sighed Aunt Dinah.

Evidently the good lady's tea-party had not been a success.

CHAPTER IX.

"Were I able to leave this chair,
Soon would I find out who is there ;
Don't tell me that you think it's the cat,
Cats don't tap, tap, tap like that ;
Cats don't know when it's half-past eight,
And come tap, tapping at the garden gate."

Six weeks passed away. Aunt Tabitha had lain in her grave three months, and Gladys had already come to the conclusion that to be an inmate of her uncle's household for long would be unendurable. And yet those six weeks were not wholly fraught with discomfort ; there were streaks of light across the darkness, so bewildering, so dazzling, so radiantly fair, that Gladys' heart beat faster, and her pulses throbbed tumultuously only to look back on them.

Six weeks, and scarcely a day passed by that did not bring Howard Langridge to

the house, and still Aunt Diana plumed herself on the good fortune in store, and Faith and Hope alternately cheered and chaffed their younger sister, and still Charity Sourby inclined fondly to the belief that the young man's visits were paid to *her*.

As Gladys stands looking out on the desolate garden, thickly covered with snow, and on the shrubs and trees all glittering with diamonds—so lustrous and pure that a king might covet them for his crown—a smile creeps over her face, half smile, half blush, and a tender consciousness droops the corners of her gentle mouth. All that is sweet and loveable in the girl has developed with her growth, into a beauty that her early youth had given no promise of. The large, brown, childish eyes

AND WHEN I REMEMBERED A CERTAIN LOOK
THAT I HAD SEEN IN THE EYES OF
THE MAN WHO HAD BEEN SEEN BY THE
FATHER OF THE LITTLE MAID, I WAS
SURE THAT THE LITTLE MAID WAS
NOT DEAD.

AS SHE STOOD THERE WITH HER EYES
FIXED ON THE STRANGER, SHE WAS
SURE THAT THE STRANGER WAS THE
FATHER OF THE LITTLE MAID, AND
OF THE GARDEN. A WOMAN'S EYES ARE
PARTICULARLY SHARP FOR PARTICULAR THINGS, AND
A LITTLE MAID'S EYES ARE SHARP FOR ALL THINGS. IT IS TRUE,
AND SHE HAS STOOD THERE SINCE THE GARDEN
PARK, AND NOW STANDS THERE CONSIDERED BY THE
SLOW-LOOKING STRANGER, EVIDENTLY WAITING OR
WAITING.

Gladys' curiosity is aroused. That
something is wrong with her little maid
she has been sure of for some time, but

what it is Gladys does not know, save that she is not happy under Mrs. Sourby's rule, and once or twice she has caught her in tears; positively, rosy, bonny, laughter-loving Ruth with big tears dimming her bright eyes, and staining her ruddy cheeks, and to Gladys' anxious query as to what ailed her, she had dried her tears quickly, and declared that "it was nothing, just nothing at all!" And what was more, her mistress had been unable to discover any cause whatever for the anomaly. But joyous, Ruth changed into a Niobe, was so strange and inexplicable a thing that Gladys had waited quietly, expecting some further demonstration of feeling, when she could insist upon an immediate confession of the cause.

And now she watches with an uneasy

vague feeling upon her—that quiet half-hidden figure in the garden—believing that the enigma is about to be solved. By-and-bye Ruth disappears altogether. But where can she have gone? A tolerably high wall runs along that side of the garden, it is quite impossible that she can have climbed over it; and even taking that for granted, what could have induced such a proceeding?

Gladys waited for some few minutes; then, as the girl did not re-appear, and it was growing dusk, she took down her hat and long waterproof cloak, and set out, resolved to unearth her. Down the long walks she sped, the soft snow yielding beneath her tread, quietly, noiselessly, until she reached the very identical yew behind which she knew Ruth must be, and here

she paused—for a strange but unmistakable sound proceeded from it. Yes, there could not be a doubt, not a vestige of a doubt; whoever was behind there, was—*kissing somebody else!*

Gladys was disgusted.

What else could you expect from a properly brought up young lady of the nineteenth century?

A moment she hesitated whether to dash aside the shrubs and reveal Ruth's delinquencies, or to steal softly back again. She decided on the latter course, and sped back to her own room, where she sat down in a little *furor* of virtuous indignation and rage.

What had come to the girl? and who was with her? and where did he, she, or it come from? Would Ruth confess all

when she came in, or what would happen? It grew very dark before Gladys, peering through the gloom, descried Ruth's fleet steps scudding back to the house. A pretty state of affairs, pondered Gladys, angrily. By-and-bye Ruth came in demurely, starting back when she found her young lady sitting in the dark.

"Won't you have the lights, Miss?" she asked, without a suspicion of anything wrong in her voice or manner; and even when a match was struck and the candles lighted, Gladys failed to trace anything amiss in the girl's face. Steadily and suspiciously did her mistress regard her, but Ruth did not flinch, busying herself as usual in arranging the room.

"Well, this is, without exception, the very strangest thing I ever knew," said Gladys,

baffled, "she won't go to bed without telling me!"

But Ruth *did* go to bed without vouchsafing any confidences whatever, and what is more, she got up the next morning, attended her mistress during the day, and retired to rest the next night, and on several successive days and nights, without the slightest mention of anything out of the ordinary way. To say that Gladys was startled, annoyed, mystified, and genuinely troubled, would give but a faint idea of the state of perturbation she had fallen into. She regarded Ruth furtively from under her long lashes from time to time, but the little sinner looked very much the same as usual.

"And whoever would suppose that she could be guilty of such dreadfully low be-

haviour," thought her mistress, indignantly. "I always did think that Ruth was a properly conducted young person; it only proves how much one may be mistaken!"

But with Gladys' annoyance and contempt we are bound to confess there lurked a large element of curiosity as to who could have been the recipient of her caresses, for Ruth knew no one at Hazelwood and Gladys did not see how she could have formed an acquaintance with any one of the other sex without her knowledge, unless indeed she had suddenly conceived a violent *penchant* for Thomas, the only man in her aunt's establishment.

"And I can't believe that," she argued, "for she has told me over and over again what a stupid fellow he was, and how he

acted more like an idiot than anything else; she has made fun of him, the sly little minx, a dozen times at least; mimicked his psalm singing, and—oh, I can't and won't believe it! It might have been a woman, after all."

Gladys leant her elbows on the dressing table and peered at herself in the mirror. "But I am quite sure it wasn't. Girls don't care much for kissing one another, as a rule, and such hearty good smacks as I overheard were never wasted over one of her own sex, I am positive; but on some good-for-nothing, odious man. Well, Ruth, my girl, you stood my friend when I was in sore need of one, and I have just made up my mind to take you on trust, and, for the first time in my life, to disbelieve the evidence of my own senses;

and I don't know as I'm going before the
throne of the great mystery, for I
am a little worried and with thinking
and the coming of evening, and I don't come
a step nearer to unravelling the enigmas,
and never said until I don't say lips
and so it goes. I always had a
secret but I think a mystery is a thousand
times more.

The three Princess were full of spirits and much gusto now. The glaze at the Hall, which had been postponed on account of the Queen's illness, was really to take place at last, and preparations were being made on a large scale. Gladys, who had quite made up her mind that it would be inconsistent for her to appear in her deep mourning at so large a gathering, was bored to death with the endless disserta-

tions as to roses, muslin, gloves, and the bewildering minutiae of a lady's ball toilette, and heartily wished the grand event was over. Howard Langridge had invited a dozen bachelor friends, and the Hall would be full.

Many and earnest were the discussions as to what each of the Sourby girls should be arrayed in. Charity, who was determined to be dressed in the height of the fashion, and to cause a general sensation, wavered between light pink and a curious dead gold colour, which, had she chanced to be a brunette, might have become her very well, but Charity's indisputably sandy hair and freckled complexion, contrasted with the amber tint of her dress, would scarcely have produced a happy effect. Gladys had much ado to move her in her

astonishment for as it is all clear the
one is hearing the dissimilar voices
arise and doing the more tentatively to
the left and even asked Hoge nonchalantly
if she did not think that Charity tried
to dissuade her from wearing that colour
through jealousy, etc.

"You know, Hoge," said the train girl,
"almost my colour suits me."

Now Hoge in her justice, was really
more sensible than either of her sisters,
and she now answered soothingly,

"Oh no, dear Charity, I do not think
that it is jealousy on our cousin's part, for
I really think myself that a nice pink, or
your favourite green would suit you much
better than yellow."

"It isn't yellow," retorted Charity,
poevishly, "and if I always wear the same

colour I shall soon be known as 'the green Miss Sourby.' No, thank you. If I mayn't have this new gold colour—and you may say what you like, it is very fashionable and pretty—I must have pink, I suppose."

And so the contest was decided in favour of pink, and Gladys picked out a soft pale tint from among the patterns, with which the table was strewn, declaring that that was the very thing.

"Law, cousin!" said Charity, disdainfully, "I never did see anyone so dowdy in their tastes as you. Of all the washy, fadey colours to choose! I shall have a bright one, I can tell you," and the one she at length selected savoured more of magenta than pink.

"What a pity!" was Gladys' unspoken

thought, as she turned aside, amused in spite of herself.

"Now this, trimmed with white roses, will be the very thing, my dear; you have such good taste," said her mother, approvingly.

"Oh, mamma, don't you think those are too large?"

Grady's looked dismayed as Aunt Diana flourished a bunch of what looked more like callianders than roses above her daughter's head. And for once, Charity heeded her cousin's advice.

"I believe you are right," she said. "Yes, mother, those are too large," and taking from her cousin's hand a delicate spray of moss buds, she added, consolingly, "I couldn't put many of those big ones on, you see, but I can have as many as I like

of these—two rows round the skirt, I think,” reflectively.

This was too much for Gladys’ gravity, and she beat a hasty retreat.

But the dresses were made at home, and what with the girls’ fidgetty remarks and the dressmaker’s admiring comments and suggestions, Gladys was almost driven wild.

“Faith, dear, let me advise you to wear a plain white dress trimmed with coloured flowers,” she said; “there will be so many pink and blue ones, I am sure you would be far more uncommon, if that is what you want.”

“Yes, and so would calico or a print be uncommon,” retorted Faith, waspishly, “but I don’t care about making myself conspicuous, thank you.”

“ Well, if you are not, every one of you, a laughing-stock for the whole room, it will be a miracle,” thought Gladys. But she said no more—words were useless, for one and all were determined to have their own way.

CHAPTER X.

“Too often we make our own path, and fling our own shadow over it, to darken it.”

Now Simon Sourby was in total ignorance of all this merry-making. Then, imagine his feelings when, on coming unexpectedly into the little back parlour one morning, billows of tulle, and boxes of flowers met his gaze! Hope, who was engaged looking for some coloured thread among the *débris* contained in an old band-box, with her back to the door, and oblivious of her father's entrance, gave vent to a most unorthodox expression of disgust at not finding what she wanted, and was somewhat surprised to find Miss Panier's (the dress-maker) foot wobbling about suggestively,

WENT ON TO HER NOSE, AND IN RAISING
HER HAND, PERCEIVED—SIMON.

"Ah—my dear—what could this mean?"
SAID THE poor man, IN consternation.
BUT before either of his daughters could
make up their minds what to say, or had
time to say so, FROM THE DISGUISE THAT HIS
UNEXPECTED APPEARANCE HAD PLUNGED THEM
INTO, MRS. SOLLEY HERSELF CAME INTO THE
ROOM, WITH HER ARMS FULL OF AN HETEROGE-
NEOUS MASS OF FANCIES, RIBBONS, ETC.
SHE, TOO, DID NOT LOOK SURPRISED AT SEEING
HER HUSBAND, AND SIMON REPEATED HIS
QUERY.

"Just a little innocent amusement, my
dear," explained the lady. "There is to be
a—a little dancing at the Hall, and—
hem! Howard was so anxious that the
girls should go, that I yielded, and—we

are preparing for it; that is all, my dear," in a would-be sportive manner.

"All!" Simon groaned aloud—"all!"

"Yes, Mr. Sourby—*all*," repeated his wife, severely, "and not much either, considering how little amusement they have at home, I am sure!" freeing her arms of their load, and facing her spouse bravely. "Come, my dear, *you* would not be the one to wish to deprive them of pleasure, now would you?" persuasively.

"Dinah—I—I"—Simon raised his hands and eyes to the ceiling, devoutly, "I am thinking of the world, the flesh, and the devil."

"And I am certain that neither Faith, Hope, nor Charity, would *never* have anything to do with one of them," briskly, "would you, my dears? Better girls and

and the other presented a mother's
tenderness. Mrs. Barker looked her own in
the eyes of the mother, and married him off
at once.

It was a long time, however, before
the two families were no longer
divided by the original differences,
and yet could not be reconciled. "Mark my
words," said Mr. Barker.

"I shall — and so my wife deceive
me — — — — — That extraordinary language,
I must say. Well, I never did — and my
wife — — — — — she would not like that."

"No, Mr. Barker, because I let you do
for the most as you like, for the time——"
pursuing, then adding, complacently, "there
is more at stake than you are aware of!
Our dear Charley's future happiness is con-
cerned. Do you comprehend?"

Apparently the worthy man was excessively dense, for notwithstanding sundry winks and nods, that would surely have let daylight into any other soul but his, he remained unconscious and impassive, helplessly staring at his wife's beaming face.

"What a dear, unsophisticated fellow you are," cooed the lady, merrily, and I think she would like to have fallen on her knees by his side, had it not been for a superabundance of flesh which rendered the experiment difficult, not to say, impossible. She contented herself, therefore, with holding one of his pudgy, warm paws between her own, and with a broad gleam of satisfaction and triumph overshadowing her, she delivered herself thus—

"Simon, you must have noticed how sweet a character is our youngest born ;

more (if I may be permitted to say so) —more like *me* than either of her sisters. Dear Charity! what a grief it will be to lose her, but—so it is, my dear! She is fair to other eyes, besides our own, and I shall soon be called upon to sacrifice my own feelings and wishes, and—”

Mrs. Sourby's voice failed, and she gave a wonderfully effective little cough, but her husband interrupted her somewhat brusquely—

“Just tell me in so many words what you mean, Dinah, without this—” If Simon had not been so *very* pious and good a man, I am afraid he would have said “confounded”—as it was, after an instant's pause, he supplied “ridiculous,” instead—“this ridiculous nonsense about your feelings.”



Seeing that she was not serving her own ends, Mrs. Sourby made haste to pour into Simon's attentive ear the whole recital of Charity's love-dream.

"Humph! then he has not yet proposed?" dryly.

"No, dear no; how could he? He has scarcely seen Charity without one or other of her sisters being with her. You cannot imagine how shy and modest the dear girl is, and how instinctively she seeks the protection of either Faith or Hope when he is by."

"Then, if I understand you aright, Mr. Langridge is expected to offer himself on the night of this ball—eh?"

"How can you be so coarse, Simon," reprovingly. "Knowing the affection that exists between the young people, is it

strange that we should imagine such a thing *might* take place? It would be a splendid match for our girl, Simon!"

"If it ever comes to anything," he growled, "that remains to be seen!"

"You no longer object to their going to the Hall, my love?" insinuatingly.

"Under the circumstances, I couldn't, Dinah," pompously. "I am sure I have no wish to stand in the way of any of my girls making good matches, only there is no telling how the matter *really* stands; you women have such an extraordinary faculty of making mountains out of molehills."

Mrs. Sourby wagged her head sagaciously, and returned to the workroom to inform the girls that, "dear papa had not the least objection to this little innocent recreation."

“How beautifully you manage him,” cried Charity, admiringly, flinging herself by her mother’s side, and kissing her rapturously, “you always get your own way, don’t you?”

“I’ll give you the recipe by-and-bye,” returned her mother, slyly, at which Faith and Hope nudged one another, and Charity looked down coyly, and giggled—“Now *don’t*! I shall be afraid to speak, I shall, if you always tease me so!”

But the preparations for the ball were as nothing, compared to the frantic scramble on the evening itself. From four o’clock in the afternoon until nine, there was hurry, bustle, and confusion, and on hearing the constant cries for pins, scissors, etc., Gladys good-naturedly proffered her assistance, but quickly found that as she was

not blessed with three pair of hands, nor could she, with the best intentions possible, be in more than one place at a time, she was of very little use, as all three sisters claimed her services at once, and giving up in despair, she retreated with flushed face and throbbing temples.

When the last moment arrived, and the fly stood at the door, Charity threw her sisters into agonies of apprehension, lest they should be late, by drawing so deep a breath that she burst the silk lace that confined her gown, and it was the work of ten minutes to repair the damage.

“You don’t think it will give way again,” asked the damsel, anxiously. “My! what *should* I do? I couldn’t keep my back to the wall the whole evening!”

“It is all right, Charity,” said her

mother, consolingly, "go and enjoy yourself my dear, and—" in a loud whisper, "bring me home some news!"

"Lor, ma, how you do love to tease!" And Charity's jubilant face, with its comical expression of deprecating self-consciousness, was the last thing that Gladys saw as she closed the hall door, and went back to the fireside.

Her aunt eyed her curiously from her easy chair, opposite.

"Well, you are a strange girl," she remarked, at length; "wouldn't put off your mourning for a single evening—"

"It wasn't *that*, Aunt Diana," returned her niece, candidly—and then she paused. How could she drag into daylight the dearest secret of her heart? How could she disclose to the calm scrutiny of her worldly-

mind ed aunt, the nervous shrinking that forbade her putting herself in the slightest degree forward, or acting in the least possible manner in an unmaidenly way? And only she herself knew what it had cost her to stay away that night. Her aunt misinterpreted her silence.

“ You mean that if you had wished very much to go, you would not have allowed that to interfere? Well, my dear, I don’t think you need have been afraid of not getting any partners, although you are *not* so handsome as my girls,” proudly, “there’s no gainsaying *that*, but some men really *prefer* peaky, white-faced girls, and if—Goodness! Whoever can that be at this time of night?” as a loud ring at the hall door resounded through the house.



Another moment and Howard Langridge, in full evening costume, stood before the astonished ladies.

“Why! why!—what—Oh! nothing is wrong with Charity?” gasped Mrs. Sourby. And then she paused, a happy consciousness breaking in upon her that the young man had already offered himself and had been referred to *her*, and that his eagerness had led him thither at once; but his first words undeceived her.

“Miss Vaughan, what do you mean by deserting us in this fashion? I had not the slightest idea that you were not coming, until I met your cousins ten minutes ago, and—and—” fumbling in his pocket—“my mother sent me over with this at once.”

As Gladys reads, a smile ripples over her

lips, and a new glad light springs to her eyes.

"Mrs. Langridge is very kind," she says, gently, "but, I—am in mourning, you know, and—"

"What is it?" asked Mrs. Sourby, suspiciously.

"Why, nuncle dear, Mrs. Langridge is good enough to wish me to be present to-night, and has written a note herself to ask me to come."

"Then my dear, *under the circumstances*, you cannot decline! Present my compliments to your mother," turning pompously to the young man, "and tell her that I am much obliged for her thoughtful consideration and kindness to my niece!" For she thought, "if she puts herself to inconvenience in this manner for my niece,

what will she not do for Charity?" Very much elated was Mrs. Sourby at this (as she chose to consider it) unmistakeable proof of the goodwill of the lady of the Hall towards her and her belongings.

The red comes and goes in Gladys' cheek as she hesitates, and then she turns and leaves the room.

"Ruth, Ruth, I am going to the Hall! Don't look so astonished, but just tell me what I am to wear? Do you think you could find that soft white cashmere I used to be so fond of?"

"Yes, miss, I could put my hand on it in the dark, for Miss Faith wanted a pretty shaped sleeve the other day, and I just cut her a pattern from that."

Gladys smiled at the thought of Faith's robust proportions being squeezed into

the handsome sweep of the robe in
cessant.

She did not keep her escort long waiting,
and when at length she pushed open the
door, and stood, with shining eyes and
pale glowing lips, before them, even her
air had no word of disapproval. Nothing
could have been more simple and appropri-
ate than that soft, clinging cashmere,
with its edges of pure white swell's
down and the delicate lace at neck and
sleeves.

"She only wants one thing to make her
perfect—a deep crimson rose among the
brown braids, and another at her bodice,
and she shall have them too," was Howard
Langridge's unspoken thought, as he smiled
down into the shy, up-lifted eyes.

Lucky was it for Gladys that the mater-



nal eyes saw no comparison between her own peerless beauty, and the florid charms of her daughters, but so sure was the proud lady that Charity had won the heart of the young squire ; and so elated was she in consequence, that it left no room for jealousy, and as for Howard Langridge's presence there to-night, did it not prove how thoroughly amiable and good-natured he was, to leave the society of his lady-love, that he might pay a very proper attention to her (Mrs. Sourby's) niece ?

“There, my dear, you really look very nice,” she said, folding a thick shawl over the girl's opera cloak.

“I wish you would have let me sent for the carriage, Miss Vaughan !” said Howard, dubiously, and, I am afraid, a little hypocritically, for the walk that lay before

them was not without its charms in his eyes.

"Oh, no," she laughed gleefully, "it is such a short distance, and I am well wrapped up."

The hall door shut upon them, and almost for the first time since she had known him, Gladys was alone with Howard Langridge.

CHAPTER XI.

“ He is whispering words of sweet intent,
While I—half doubting—whisper a consent.
—Is it a dream? Then waking would be pain;
Oh do not wake me, let me dream again.”

THEIR way led across the park, and through the grounds to the hall; it was at once, the shortest and most secluded way.

“ Gladys darling !”

The bright colour flooded her face, but she did not demur when he took both her hands in his, and with eyes telling their tale—ah me, so plainly, searching the downcast blushing face—standing among the snow-laden trees and shrubs sparkling under the calm holy starlight, he spoke, and she listened, with bent head, and pulses fast bounding.

“ Gladys—one word, my darling ! Tell me that you love me !”

Could she resist the passionate, earnest face, quivering with emotion; the deep, dark eyes that sought hers, and compelled the words that fell at last from her lips—

“ I do ! oh my love, my love !” and, moved out of herself, as never in the course of her life had she been before, she fell on his breast and suffered his caresses.

Are there not moments in life, fraught with so much of bliss, that the hours of gloom and misery that must surely be their counterpart, are forgotten ? Is there not a love and sympathy between kindred souls, so great, that this earth becomes a paradise, and the future is as naught ?

While his lips still sought hers, she freed herself.



“ Oh what am I doing ?” she cried,
“ have I *forgotten* ?”

“ Forgotten ?” he echoed, “ what is
there to remember at such a time as this,
save that we love one another ?”

“ Hush,” she said, tearing herself away
from him and standing apart, “ you must
not tell me that again until you *know all*
that I have to confess.”

He smiled indulgently. He was a man
of the world, and it amused him that this
child, this innocent gentle girl should hint
at mysteries ; should speak as though there
were some dark page in her life’s history
that must be laid bare before she might
accept his love.

“ Darling,” he whispered earnestly,
“ whatever you may have to tell me can
make no difference in my love for you ; it

is yours alone, now and for ever. Say sweet one, do you accept it as your own ?”

A bewildered gaze grew into her large eyes as she raised them to his, a look of half sorrow, half contrition that overwhelmed and blotted out the love-light that had dwelt there a few moments ago.

“Not yet—not yet ! Oh you must wait—you don’t know *what* I am !”

“Yes Gladys, I do,” chivalrously, bending his head until his lips rested on the trembling hands she had locked together. “I know that you are the sweetest maiden that ever gave herself to gladden a man’s heart and home.”

In the starlight it seemed as if she grew strangely pale and shivered as he spoke.

“It is too cold to stand here,” he said

reluctantly, for he would fain have lingered, and he gathered up Aunt Diana's shawl from the path where it had fallen, and wrapped it about her once more. "I must take care of you now my darling. Oh Gladys, I have no words in which to tell you of my love !"

"If you really love me as you say you do, you will respect my wish, and wait until I have told you of my former life !"

"Very well child ; so be it," he answered merrily. "This terribly criminal life of yours shall be disclosed, and your tender conscience consoled, and until then my lips shall be religiously sealed, but—how long do you mean to keep me in suspense ?" laughing right joyously into her downcast troubled face.

"To-morrow," she answered.

Where was the heir ? Nobody knew. He had not been seen since the arrival of his guests. Faith and Hope looked askance at one another, and the only thing that saved Charity from dissolving into tears, as the moments passed by, and still he did not come, was the reflection that her nose was apt to become a brilliant ruby, and her eyes were wont to swell and inflame, rendering weeping an impossible luxury at that moment. So Charity snapped her mouth tightly together, and looked straight before her at the rapidly whirling couples.

“ Oh, goodness ! I’m going to faint ! catch me, somebody ! ” she cried suddenly sinking back ; but on opening her eyes, after a moment or two, and finding no one near her, except a most

unpleasant looking old man, who was regarding her comically, she sat upright, and beckoned Hope from the other side of the room, to come to her. But mid-way across the floor Hope's steps were arrested, and her attention rivetted ; she stood stock still with her mouth open, and her eyes distended to their extreme limit, and thus formed no slight obstacle to a middle-aged couple spinning around with more energy than elegance. A bump, a crash, a general scramble, and Hope, borne along at a furious pace, was flung on Charity's lap, while the elderly couple, after a helpless flounder or two, subsided on the floor.

Hope scarcely waited to regain her breath, " Oh— do look ! If there actually—"

"I know," replied her sister, more composedly. "It is *Maïlys*. But what I want to know is, *what* is she doing here, and *how* did she come?"

"And what a gown!" Hope's thin neck was raised in disgust. "Did you ever see such a thing? Positively it isn't a garment that your old friend *Maïlys* wears."

In that moment *Maïlys* released from her partner, caught sight of her cousins, and crossed her way across to them rather more successfully than Hope had done.

"You are surprised to see me?" she said. *Maïlys* just looked up into the sweet flushed face, so full of gladness, into the great, brown eyes, luminous and soft with secret joy, and was tongue-tied, but

Hope, not having so much at stake as her sister found voice to say—

“Why of course we are ! Did you come in Cindrella’s coach, or how ?”

“I walked” answered the girl softly, with the pink deepening in her cheek, and the rose at her bosom rising and falling suspiciously fast. “Mrs. Langridge was so good as to send over for me, and Aunt Diana thought it would be rude if I did not come,” with pardonable hypocrisy.

“Whatever made the old lady be so wonderfully considerate ?” queried Hope. “Oh, I suppose she felt it her duty to be polite to you seeing that you are as good as one of *the family* !”

Gladys bit her lips to prevent herself from laughing outright, but Charity was perfectly yellow with rage and jealousy,

and had just opened her mouth for the express purpose of giving her cousin a piece of her mind, as she would herself have expressed it, when a voice at her elbow interrupted.

“Miss Sourby, half the evening is over, and I have not had a single waltz yet!”

Oh woman! woman!

In a second the smiles had returned, the past was forgotten, and laughing, coquetting, and tossing her head, while glancing on all sides to see who might be observing her triumph, Charity moved away on Howard Langridge’s arm.

It was long after supper, and when many of the guests had gone home, that Gladys yielded to her lover’s entreaties for one dance. She had been so fearful of calling forth remark and laying herself open to

suspicion, that she had positively refused at first, but already she had begun to learn that there were few things she could deny to the man she loved, and as he threw his strong arm round her, holding her hand in a firm, warm clasp, she felt that she had never known what dancing was before.

They paused at length, and Gladys, dizzy, tired, and panting, had thrown herself on a couch, while Howard took the fan that hung at her side, when a voice close by said,

“Hallo, Langridge, I have scarcely seen you this evening! Where on earth—. I beg your pardon,” as Gladys drew her dress aside. “Why! is it possible? Mrs.—Miss—Mrs.—” stammered the stranger.

Gladys looked up and then bowed coldly.

“You are mistaken,” she said, gently.

“I have not the pleasure of your acquaintance.”

Howard raised his eyes from the face of his lady-love to encounter such an expression as he had never seen before upon his friend's face—disbelief, and withering, insolent contempt. In another moment the lovers were alone, for the stranger turned on his heel and strode off.

“Did you know—had you ever?—” began Howard, but she held up her hand imperatively.

“I am too tired to enter into explanations to-night; you shall know all to-morrow, and if—” with all the love of her heart welling up into her voice, “if you think I have deceived you, remember how young I was, and how desolate.”

What *did* she mean? What *could* she

mean? How girls loved to make romances out of every-day occurrences!

He bent over her,

“My darling, I love you as I believe no man ever loved a woman before, and inso-much as you care for *me* no power on earth shall part us—nothing, and no one shall ever come between us, Gladys!”

And she raised her face, all smiling and dimpled, with renewed hope and trust.

An hour later, when the drawing rooms were deserted, Claude Raynor laid his hand on his host's arm, saying, curiously,

“How on earth did she come here?—Mrs. Nairn.”

“Mrs. who? What are you talking about?”

“Well, whatever name you like to give her—it doesn't make much difference, I

suppose," returned the other, carelessly, "but how did she get an entrance here, my dear boy?"

"Are you speaking of the lady whom you mistook for someone else?" asked Howard, quietly. "You had better be careful what you say for she is the niece of a lady and gentleman much respected in this neighbourhood, and moreover is—my promised wife."

Claude Raynor fell back a step or two.

"Well, have you anything more to say?" asked Howard.

"I—I don't know; I suppose I ought—and yet it's no business of mine."

The amazement on the young man's face struck terror into Howard's mind, and he said, shortly, "Speak! What do you know of her?"

“Simply this that she is not what she represents herself to be—” then, bending forward, he whispered something into his friend’s ear.

Howard started up as if he had been stung.

“It is false ! false ! prove it; you cannot ! Oh, my God !” And he fell forward with his face upon his hands, and neither moved nor spoke, for in his heart he *believed* it, and the shock had almost killed him.

And she lay sleeping, all unconscious that the new life which had opened so brightly was already darkened, and that the man who had sworn to love her for ever, through good and evil report, already believed her to be both false and vile, and in her dreams she told of her foolish, hurried

marriage, and its concealment, and again listened to the perjured vow, "Remember, I love you, and nothing on earth shall come between us," and, in her dream, she smiled.

CHAPTER XII.

“Never to meet more while day follows day,
Never to kiss more till our lips are clay ;
Angry hearts grieve loud awhile,
Broken hearts are dumb or smile.
O, my darling, my lost darling,
Say Farewell, and—go !”

It is a crisp clear morning, cold and frosty. “The very day for a walk,” says Gladys, as she comes face to face with Charity in the hall. That young lady tosses her sandy locks defiantly and hopes Gladys will enjoy it. A smile parts the girl’s lips as she hurries on, through the garden and the park, and into the grounds that stretch beyond the Hall. She has not far to go, and he is waiting for her—waiting with the sunlight flickering on his bonny brown hair, and—ah, me ! what misery and dumb despair at his heart.

She steals softly upon him, her beautiful eyes alight with love, and just a little quiver of expectancy about the corners of her mouth. She has a confession to make—what if he should upbraid her with deceit and hypocrisy? Why, oh, why has she concealed her marriage? For the first time an undefined feeling steals over and takes possession of her, and she sees that she has acted foolishly, and yet—surely a deep, true love could pardon a greater sin than hers had been—it was but a very innocent deceit after all, harmful to no one but herself.

Just at first he might look grave, but afterwards, when she should have told him all, have whispered of her dreary lonely life and the temptation it had been to escape from it all, would he not gather her to him

and forgive? With pulses throbbing, and the colour coming and going in her fair cheek, she comes slowly over the snow-laden grass, and he turns—the love light dies out of her eyes, the trembling lips steady themselves—ah, me! the pity of it all! the pity of it! “So, you have come!”

Is this the greeting to which she has looked forward? Are these the words of love she has been awaiting. She glances at the stern face and knit brows, and arms herself with woman’s never failing weapon, taking refuge in her pride.

“Yes, I have come—to find you have repented—*already!*”

He ignores the taunt—perhaps he is scarcely conscious of her meaning, as he bends his clear eyes to a level with her

own and looks coldly, scrutinisingly into their depths. Her gaze meets his, then droops and falls, and her heart stands still, yet she makes an effort to speak.

“ I owe it to you to tell you—” she begins falteringly, and pauses there, for the contempt and ill-concealed scorn in his steady stare stings her to the quick.

“ You need not distress yourself to make any confession to me,” he says, “ I have learnt it already, *Mrs. Nairn* ! You are too late ! ”

One startled cry escapes her, and she grasps her hands tightly the one within the other.

“ And—you cannot forgive ? ” her whole heart on her lips as she awaits his sentence.

“ Do men forgive these things ? ” he asks



scoffingly. "I am not one of those who do and can! You spoke truly when you said you were not what I thought you!"

"You cannot understand what a temptation, such—" again the words still themselves. Can she plead for pity where love is dead?

"Poor soul," he says gently, looking down on the white woe-stricken features. Then as the memory of his blind trust and love for this girl sweeps over him; how but yesterday he would have staked his life on her innocence and purity, and even now finds it hard to credit, difficult to believe, he cries aloud—

"Heavens! is this thing *possible*?—are all women weak? Is there on earth so fair a garb for so false a soul? You, who I

dreamt of as true and good, and worthy of an honest man's whole heart—and now—”

She might have been some lovely marble statue, so still she stands ; not more white is the driven snow at her feet than her beautiful blanched face. The fiat has gone forth, and she accepts it meekly.

“I was so young,” hovers on her lips, but scarce escapes into sound.

She does not attempt to extenuate herself. She remains impassive beneath his cruel taunts. Pshaw ! was it possible that he had faintly hoped that she would *deny* it !

Had he been fool enough—blind, incredulous, doting fool—to dream that there was a loop-hole somewhere, and that the proud eyes would flash indignation at the

imputation, and the sweet lips assert their innocence?

The silence is broken only by the sound of wheels in the distance, and the patter of the sun-kissed icicles as they melt and drop to earth. Then she speaks, rousing herself as if from a dream.

“It is over—I may go?”

He is weak enough to love her yet, to love her despite her falsity and frailty, to love her madly, passionately, and to feel his strong heart breaking within him at the knowledge that he must put her from him.

God! what cruel deeds there are that men must do! There is many a battle fought beneath calm smiling skies that knows no din of troops, no dust, no bloodshed, no turmoil, but the scars whereof are

as deep and incurable as any from the bayonet's point.

She turns to go without once lifting her eyes to the face she loves so well! Are they to part thus? Is this the end? Has the life begun last night ended to-day?

He springs forward and clasps her to him, covering her face and neck with burning kisses. For one blissful moment he forgets what she has been, what she is! remembers only that she is in his arms, and that a moment later she will have gone out of his life for ever. He strains her to him, then flings her off—

“Go,” he says brokenly, “and pray God that I may never see your fair false beauty again!”

* * * * *

“Oh, what is the matter!”

Faith and Charity come flying downstairs tumbling over one another in their eagerness to reach the breakfast-room, whence loud angry voices are issuing.

"It is perfectly true," gasps Hope, who is out of breath with running. "Do you think I am such an idiot as not to know what I saw with my own eyes. I tell you that they are still there in the shrubbery!"

"Who?" shrieks Charity, turning purple with agitation, and a nameless, horrible fear.

"Our innocent cousin Gladys, and *your* lover," sneers Hope, disregarding her mother's warning finger, "and they were kissing each other when I saw them last," she adds viciously; "I don't know if they have got through it yet."

“Horrible! disgraceful! shameful,” cries Faith, but after a prolonged—“Oh—h—h—h!” Charity slips off the sofa on to the floor, where she sprawls at full length, with closed eyes; not that she is in the least inclined to faint, but because she has a dim idea that that position is the most becoming in which to receive the dire intelligence.

“A nasty, scheming, artful bit of goods!”

“Who?” asks Hope pertly. “Do you mean Gladys or Mr. Langridge?”

“I am referring to your cousin, my dear!” says her mother, austerely. Then smoothing her apron down, she adds, “if a girl throws herself at a man’s head, what can he do, poor fellow? Of course it is very foolish and culpable of Mr. Langridge, I am not defending his conduct; but, Charity, my

child, don't judge him before you know what provocation he has had !”

“ They were at it a long time, anyhow ! ” supplements Hope, who, not possessing a lover of her own, rather enjoys her sister's discomfiture.

“ But she will make him marry her ! ” cries the disconsolate damsel from amid the roses blooming on Mrs. Sourby's carpet.

“ My dear,” reprovingly, and lifting her hands in holy horror, “ men do not marry those sort of girls ! Contrast his conduct to you, with what it has been to your cousin, and you will see the force of what I say. He never kissed you, did he, Charity ? ”

“ No, indeed ! ” viciously, “ I only wish he would try it on.”

Which I have not the slightest hesitation

in acknowledging was a very truthful and
beneficial wish :

At this moment the door opened, and
Gladys herself entered with a somewhat
bewildered expression, as she glanced
round.

"Upon my word!" began her aunt.

"Oh, you horrid, ungrateful little minx!"
said Faith.

"Well, and what have you done with
Charity's lover?" asked Hope, pertly,
"because, when you have quite finished
with him, she might like to have him
herself."

Whereupon Charity flung herself back-
ward once more and commenced howling
in the most appalling way, beating a
tattoo with her heels on the floor. Up
started Mrs. Sourby and flew to her

assistance, darting a venomous glance at her niece.

"You have killed my poor child! To think I should have nursed a viper in my bosom!" hysterically.

"Stop, aunt," said Gladys, authoritatively, "I have paid you well for all I have had of you, and am under no obligations whatever to you!"

"And what of your fine lover, Miss?" shrieked her infuriated aunt. "Couldn't you find one of your own, without robbing my poor child of the only man she ever cared for?"

"Rubbish!" says Gladys, shortly. "What love-making there has been between them has existed in your imagination alone."

"Oh, the idea! I'd be ashamed I would!"

cried the sisters, together, while Charity pulled whole handfuls of—hairpins out of her sandy locks.

“Well, aunt, Charity can have her lover back—I have done with him.”

“He has done with you, more likely,” cried the lady. “Do you suppose he would marry a girl who kissed him in the public streets?”

“Aunt Diana!” Gladys drew her slight figure to its full height. “Mr. Langridge asked me last night to be his wife; but to-day he is free to ask the same question of Charity, or anyone else he chooses, for he is nothing more to me!” Her pale lips quivered as she hurriedly left the room, followed by Hope’s harsh voice,

“A very likely story.”

“May I come in, uncle?”

The Reverend Simon looked somewhat annoyed at being detected in a nap while supposed to be writing his sermon for the following Sunday, but as his niece appeared quite unconscious of the fact, he believed himself undetected, and pulling out his handkerchief, flapped his brow relievedly.

“Uncle—” the girl’s voice trembles, and her young face looks strangely wan and altered, as she puts one hand on the table to steady herself—“Uncle, I want you to tell me exactly how much money I have of my own,” she says.

“Eh? What? My dear, how much money, eh? You are not thinking of getting married, are you?” jocularly.

“No,” she responds, with a quick impatient motion, “but I—I am not happy here. I suppose it is no fault of my aunt’s;

yet, the fact remains, I am not happy, and I have come here this morning to ask you candidly how much have I to live on? Have I enough to support myself?"

Simon Sourby looked up into the pale, changed features with something of pity stirring his sluggish nature.

"Well, my dear," he said, "there is a hundred a-year that your Aunt Tabitha left you, but as for anything else, the poor Colonel's affairs were in such a terribly confused state that little or nothing has been done as yet, and—really, upon my word, I doubt if there will be anything for you there."

She sighed, while a wistful light stole into the troubled eyes. "Then I must earn my own living," she said.

He smiled indulgently. "What can you

do?" looking at the slim white hands, and delicate patrician face, "to earn a living. It is easier to talk of than to accomplish! There, child, make up your squabble with your cousins, for I suppose *they* are at the bottom of this business. They are good girls at heart," with a little pardonable pride, "and by-and-bye, perhaps, we shall be able to make it a little more pleasant for you; more cheerful and all that. I don't know how far you are in Charity's confidence, but—" Simon paused and stroked his fat hands one over the other complacently.

"Oh dear," thought Gladys, could it be possible that he too was possessed with this mad idea! Were they all blind or stupid, or what had come over them, that they failed to see how matters really stood.

They must be either very conceited or hopelessly obtuse not to have found out long ago that Charity was not the magnet that drew Howard Langridge to Jordan House.

“I can take a situation,” she said quietly, ignoring her uncle’s speech, “as companion; I—I fear I am not competent to teach.”

“If you can find one, you mean. Take my advice, my dear girl; stay at home and put up with any little annoyances you may meet with here, for depend upon it, you will have far more disagreeable things to encounter out in the world. Ladies who require companions are few and far between, and even if you were so lucky as to meet with one, I doubt very much if your proud nature would submit to be

treated as something a little better than a lady's maid."

Gladys' cheek flushed, and she winced.

"There, child," continued the reverend gentleman, with a quick adaptation of his ordinary suave, oily manner, and offensive semi-religious tone, "go and learn to subdue this discontented spirit, for He who——"

"Simon Sourby," cried his wife's shrill voice behind him, "I don't think you would waste your time over this young lady if you knew what she had been capable of. I never could have believed it—never!" emphatically.

Simon glanced from the red, angry features of his better half, to the contempt and scorn expressed on his niece's features, in no little surprise and mystification.

“Perhaps she has confessed to you how she has plotted and schemed to win your daughter’s lover from her, and broken her heart,” sneeringly. “She will never get over it, she is so sensitive and gentle, my poor child, and if—if she *dies*,” with a shrill scream, “it will be your doing, you bold, bad, unnatural girl, and I only hope and trust that——”

Gladys waits to hear no more, runs swiftly upstairs, bolts her door, and throws herself by her bedside, to weep out the passionate aching of her heart, and put away from her for ever the dream of happiness that had been too bright, too alluring to last.

END OF VOL. II.



